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Dazzler!
InFocus SP8600 projector p58



Reviewed DUNE B1 SMART MEDIA PLAYER
PANASONIC 42IN SMART TV SAMSUNG 40IN 3D TV

YOU'RE BUSTED! IS YOUR MEDIA SERVER ILLEGAL?

Transform your home cinema!

Smart TV, Smart Blu-ray: Samsung & Panasonic battle it out



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Who's saying 3D is the only way for the future?

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3D formats: Active and Passive do battle, p24

WELCOME



Are you a 'smart' home cinema enthusiast? By which we mean, do you want your AV products to connect to the Net and to each other? We help you answer that question in this issue, with reviews of the latest smart TVs from Samsung and Panasonic, plus a bumper roundup of smart Blu-ray players starting on page 75.

The other great debate in the AV world is over 3D, and on page 34 we try to settle once and for all the question of whether active or passive systems deliver better performance.

This issue's third controversy revolves around copyright. **Some people don't want you to rip your discs to a media server – but are they in the right, or behind the times?** Find out on page 28!

And if you're exhausted by these debates, you can simply enjoy our in-depth reviews of the latest screens, speakers, projectors, systems and players. *Home Cinema Choice* – where fact times importance equals news!

Chris Jenkins

Editor

TEAM HCC

Chris Jenkins: Industry veteran Chris remembers when movies came on stone tablets



Mark Craven: *HCC*'s Deputy Editor is as passionate about AV gear as he is about Jason Statham



Anton van Beek: Anton's love of cinema makes him the fount of all movie knowledge



James Waldron: Taking on our tech testing calls on James' in-depth audio engineering skills



Jill Lubetkin: Jill's magazine skills mean that even the techiest articles make perfect sense



John Rook: Art Editor John was here when amps were all silver the first time around



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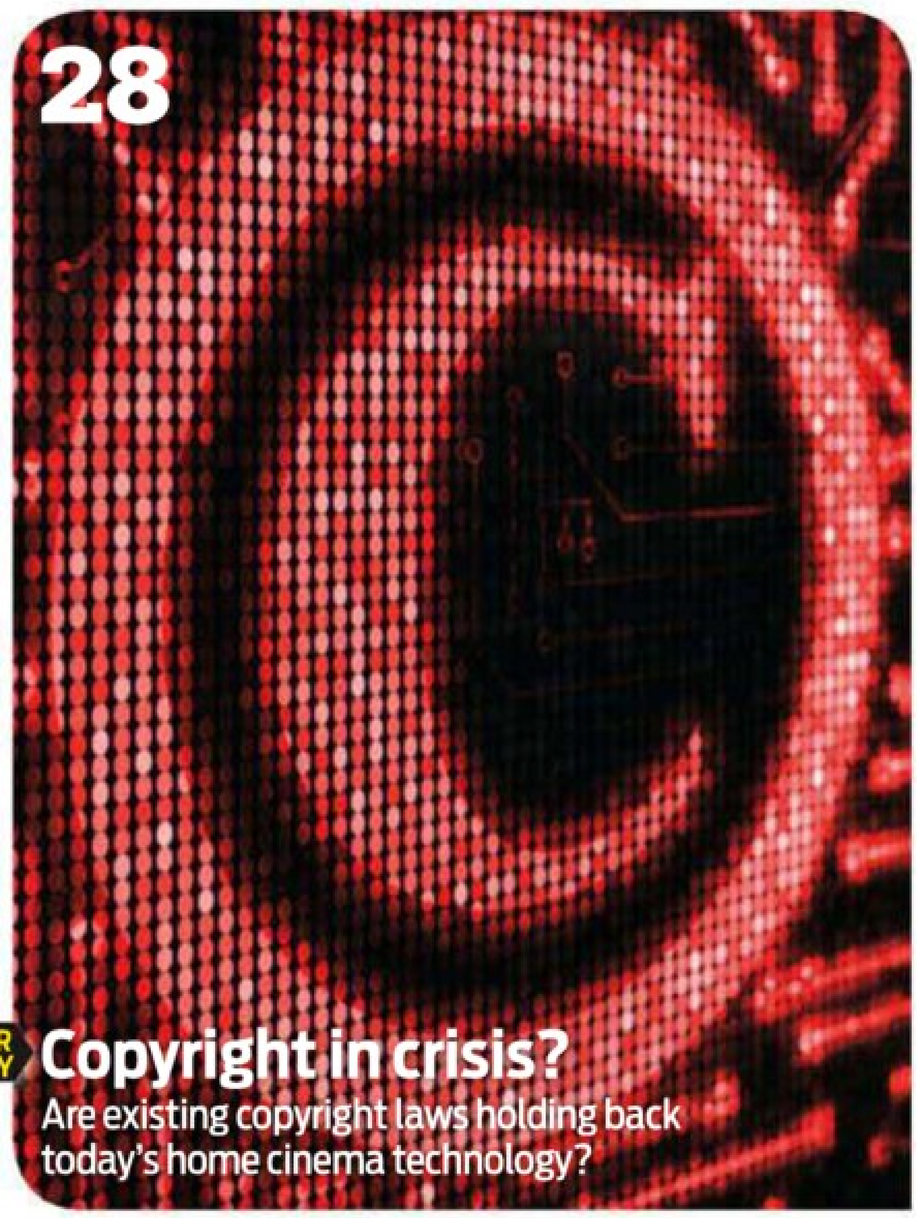
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Philips BDP-7600
Samsung BD-D7500
Sony BDP-S480



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Equipment reviewed in *Home Cinema Choice* is measured and quantified by Future Tech Labs, which for more than 15 years has set the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase

CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Adam Rayner: The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Richard Stevenson: Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal *ERT*



Steve May: *HCC*'s former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journos



John Archer: The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early *HCC* staffer



Martin Pipe: Technology specialist Martin co-developed *HCC*'s Tech Lab operation



Adrian Justins: Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*



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BULLETIN

→News highlights **SIM2** Why there's no future for high-end 2D projectors **ROVI** Smart TV is changing home entertainment forever **HOME TECH EVENT** All the highlights of the recent trade expo **BOSTON ACOUSTICS** Slimline soundbar unleashed **JAMO** New affordable floorstanding surround system **PRIEST** Could this be the salvation of 3D Blu-ray? **AND MORE!**

Silver service

Marantz SR6006 → www.marantz.co.uk



As every enthusiast knows, the AV receiver is the beating heart of your home cinema system – which makes it vital that you choose one that delivers the goods. Marantz's £850 SR6006 looks likely to fit the bill, serving up a claimed 7x 110W of power, seven 3D-compatible HDMI v1.4 inputs and two outputs, and AirPlay functionality. Other features include 1080p upscaling of analogue and digital video, an iPod-compatible USB input, internet radio access and plenty of other network features for those looking to make it the cornerstone of their 'connected home'. It's available in black and silver finishes.

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Five jive

Jamo S426HC3 → www.bbg.eu.com

Shopping around for multichannel audio solutions on a tight budget doesn't always mean going down the dinky satellites route. Danish audio specialist Jamo's latest 5.0 speaker package features a pair of S426 floorstanders, with dual 5.5in woofers partnered to a 1in soft dome tweeter. Completing the package are a pair of compact S420 surrounds (with twin 3.5in woofers and a 0.75in tweeter) and the slimline S420 centre (single 3.5in woofer, 0.75in tweeter). Priced at just £300, you should have enough cash left to find a suitable subwoofer (like Jamo's new SUB 260 – see p12) to go with it.

Partner with...

Yamaha RX-V471

Affordable AV receiver → £300 Approx



Energy-efficient design and 3D technology are the cornerstone of Yamaha's latest generation of AV receivers. This 5.1-channel model supports 3D video, plus a more immersive audio experience thanks to the implementation of Cinema DSP 3D processing and Virtual Presence Speaker tech for enhanced spatial depth. Other key features include a claimed 5x 105W of power and a USB interface for streaming music directly from an iPod or iPhone.

http://uk.yamaha.com

StereoKegs.com

Smooth operator



Panasonic's 65in 3D monitor joins the 85, 103 and 152in stereoscopic models in its professional plasma range. Shipping in September (price TBA), the TH-65VX300E is equipped with high-speed drive tech for smoother gradation and extremely detailed 3D video. An integrated 'professional quality engine', is claimed to 'double the colour reproduction compared to conventional models'. The monitor offers numerous customisable features including Colour Gamut, RGB placement, five gamma curve options and white balance settings.
www.panasonic.net/proplasma

Shortened wait



German AV brand Loewe has now introduced its full HD 3D-compliant Blu-ray player, the BluTech Vision 3D to accompany its Individual Compose 3D range of TVs.

Priced around £765 and available in a choice of chrome silver or aluminium black finishes, this stylish Profile 2.0 disc-spinner claims fast boot and loading times and packs features including 1080p upscaling, HDMI v1.4 connectivity, Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA compatibility, and Loewe Digital Link HD functionality.
www.loewe-uk.com

Vocal boost



Following positive customer reaction to its upgraded PB1i Signature loudspeakers, PMC has revealed that it has decided to give its hand-crafted OB1i speaker similar treatment. Co-founder Peter Thomas has reworked the crossover of the OB1i to ramp up the detail and transparency of the mid vocal range from the 3in soft-dome driver, working alongside a PMC/SEAS developed 1in tweeter and 6.7in bass driver. Priced around £5,000 per pair, the OB1i Signature speaker features a Rose Palissandre veneer and comes with a certificate of authenticity.
www.pmc-speakers.com

SIM2 reveals secret weapon

Triple flash tech holds the key to perfect active shutter performance

When SIM2's multimedia managing director, Alan Roser challenged *HCC* – at a sneak peak of the company's new 3D projector – with, 'I don't care how hard you try, you will never see crosstalk on this product', we focused our full attention on the subsequent 3D demonstrations in the hope of proving him wrong. The fact that we were unable to do so shows that Roser has every right to feel proud of the tech powering the company's install-friendly £30,000 Lumis 3D-S.

This isn't SIM2's first foray into the world of 3D consumer projectors, having previously offered a double-stacked passive projector system. But as Roser freely admits, while the industry reception was overwhelmingly positive, 'from a consumer point of view, it's not a realistic thing to put in the home, so we needed a single-chassis projector solution to do that'.

Lashings of flash

The big difference between SIM2's new PJ and those of other brands is the inclusion of 'triple flash' technology to overcome the flicker and ghosting issues often associated with active shutter technology. Roser explains: 'other technologies are limited by refresh rates up to 120Hz, giving them two options – refreshing each eye twice at a rate of 96Hz, which can lead to flicker, or operating at 120Hz, which causes problems with motion judder. Triple flash means that we present 3D at 144Hz. So instead of 3D Blu-ray content being at 48Hz per eye, it's 72Hz per eye. This means you are able to have better motion. It means you are going to give the viewer less of what we call parallax errors or phasing errors, so it's more comfortable on the eye'.



Alan Roser, MD Multimedia: Claims to have eliminated crosstalk on 3D projectors

Couple this with the enhanced brightness offered by the Lumis 3D-S's three-chip DLP technology, and its no wonder that the projector sailed through three notoriously tricky 3D Blu-ray demo scenes (two from *Tangled* and *Tron Legacy's* Light Cycle pursuit) with flying colours – even in a space as hampered by ambient light leakage at a booth on the floor of the Home Technology Event 2011 trade show.

Catching up with Roser after the demo, *HCC* asked whether or not he believed there was still a place for a 2D-only, high-end projector. 'No. Not at all', was his immediate reply. 'I think that when you get to a certain amount of money you will want 3D, whether you like it or not.'

But what about those people who have yet to be won over by stereoscopy? 'Not everyone gets 3D at present,' claims Roser, 'but I don't think the film industry is doing itself any favours. Ignoring the quality of the films themselves, some are too dim and some of the post conversion is quite poor on others.'



High flyer: Promises stable 3D images

Playlist...

Team *HCC* reveals its Playback picks of the last month

Primeval: Series Five (R2 DVD)



The sci-fi adventure where the CGI monsters are more convincing than the actors. *CJ*

The Next Three Days (Region B BD)

This smart US remake uses Russell Crowe's everyman talents well and looks great in HD. *MC*

Bewitched: Season One (R2 DVD)



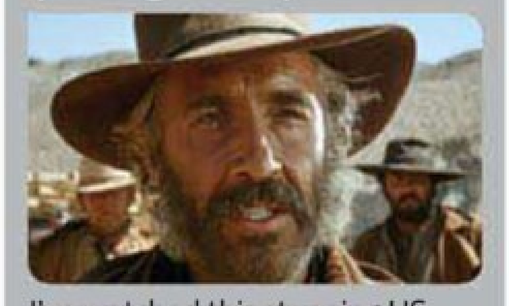
The late Fifties series introduced Sam and Darren. Canned laughter was still irritating back then. JL

Thundercats: The Complete Collection (R2 DVD)



I've been revisiting the original series. Cheesy, yes, but better than I remembered. *JW*

Once Upon a Time in the West (All-region BD)



I've watched this stunning US import disc repeatedly. A great hi-def release of one of the best films ever made. *AvB*

Stereokaos.com

Talkback

Team *HCC* reveals its thoughts about the future of physical media



Alison Graham of the *Radio Times* bemoans the fact that TV viewers no longer share 'watercooler moments', talking about last night's programmes; now, there's always someone who has recorded the show for later viewing and doesn't want to hear 'spoilers'. Get used to it, Alison; Smart TV and the Internet are conspiring to bring us the content we want, when we want it, not at the whims of broadcasters. I can't remember the last time I watched a TV show as it was being broadcast - except for *The Mentalist*, of course. **CJ**



There's no avoiding 'Smart' AV products any more - but is this what home cinema hedz really want? My experience is mixed. I love the integration of YouTube on my BD player, but gave up using Twitter on my TV after one go – it's quicker to use my mobile.

I also think there's an issue of duplication. Buyers of a new TV and Blu-ray player are likely to be paying twice for the same Smart functions. Who needs LOVEFiLM access on two devices sitting next to each other? With that in mind, I'd like to see a choice of 'Dumb' high-performance products, too. **MC**

Smart TV changes everything

Rovi predicts the future of multi-platform digital content

Smart TV is changing the entertainment landscape forever, says Rovi. The media content giant (it provides listings 'metadata' for companies such as Samsung) sponsored an exclusive London conference in June, and *HCC* was there to pick up all the news.

Samsung's Head of Content Services, Dan Saunders, said that the perception that connected TV services such as Samsung's Smart Hub are only available on premium-priced products is inaccurate. 'For the platforms to work we have to achieve a critical mass,' he explained. 'Samsung sells 33 per cent of flatpanel TVs across Europe, and 75 per cent of these are connected.'

Rovi's Chief Evangelist, Richard Bullwinkle, said that the number of connectable sets that are used online is up to 50 per cent and continues to grow. Rovi ascribes this to the wider use of wi-fi connection and upgradeable operating systems.

'It's not a game about having 300,000 apps available on a TV as you have on a smartphone,' said Saunders, 'it's about having the essential apps to attract content and users. There are over 500 apps available for Samsung Smart TVs, but to work well for each territory there are 70 or so, localised by language and content.' Applications such as Twitter appeal mainly to a younger audience, while for families, the essential use of Smart TV is for content searching.

'Smart TV enables you to search for content through multiple platforms: the internet, media servers, portable devices among them use viewer preference and 'favourites' algorithms,' said Saunders.

So the future of Smart TV could well depend on the apps developed for it, but these won't all necessarily be for viewing movie or TV content. Clive Gardiner of online music service We7 talked



Dan Saunders, Samsung: Apps are not a numbers game, they are essentials

about the way music content could be customised for the viewer, and Jean-Pierre Fumigalli of online ad specialist Smartclip explained that the longer viewing times of TV compared to PC users gave advertisers an opportunity to customise ads according to viewer data.

Making video pay

But the toughest nut to crack remains how to deliver movie and television entertainment via Smart TV and make it pay, particularly with the prospect of 'TV anywhere', where the user expects to be able to view content on any device. Richard Bullwinkle put it this way: 'Looking at Apple's iCloud, it's like a $25-per-year amnesty for anyone who ever stole music. But video always had better content protection, and it's crucial they find a way to make money. The industry won't trade physical dollars for internet pennies.'



Clever: We7 music streaming (left) and Samsung Smart TV

First-class BD



Twentieth Century Fox has taken the comic book franchise back to basics with this year's *X-Men: First Class*. Directed by Matthew '*Kick Ass*' Vaughn, the film returns the mutant heroes to their Cold War origins as it explores the early friendship between present day rivals Professor X and Magneto. While there's been no official announcement yet, *HCC* has used its mutant powers to look into the future and can confirm that Fox will be bringing the film to DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on October 31, with no less than 14 minutes of deleted scenes as well!
www.fox.co.uk

Teufel's pillars



Teufel has introduced an affordable new home cinema speaker system, the Columa 200. Priced around £480, the system is comprised of four column speakers and an identically configured centre speaker featuring two 2.75in mid-range drivers and a 0.75in fabric dome tweeter. The 150W active subwoofer houses a 10in Klippel-optimised bass driver. The brand claims that the 5.1-channel package has been developed for use in rooms up to 30m² and 'proves that huge subwoofers and wall-mounted speakers are not always necessary'.
www.teufelaudio.co.uk

Jamo goes low



UK distributor BBG has announced the availability of the £300 SUB 260 – Jamo's latest woofer. Available in a choice of dark apple or black ash finishes, the 260W unit comes equipped with a long-throw 8in driver housed in a slotted-port cabinet. According to BBG, the driver uses a very rigid cone to 'allow high excursion with low distortion', while the large motor structure features a ventilated pole-piece to eliminate unwanted mechanical damping and air-pressure from the system – which should all make it sound better.
www.bbg.eu.com

Boston audio party



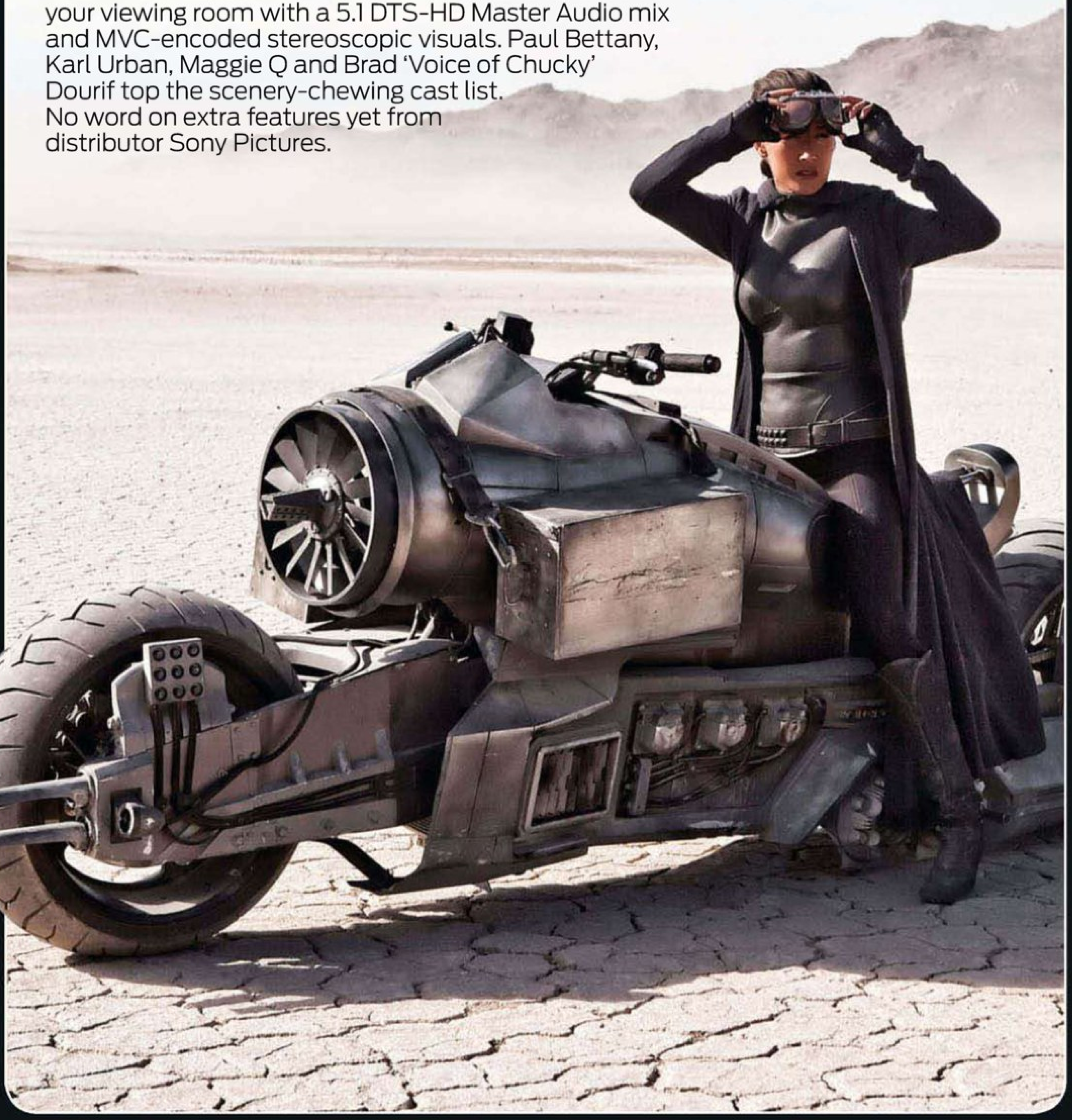
Boston Acoustics continues its pursuit of what it calls 'advanced TV enhancement systems' with the release of its TVee Model 30 slimline soundbar and matching wi-fi subwoofer.

Promising 'the next step in the evolution of the soundbar concept', the £450 system doesn't just deliver room-filling virtual 3.1-channel surround sound for TV, movie and gaming content, but it also sports a dedicated Music Mode and wireless streaming via Bluetooth from PC and Smartphone.
www.bostona.eu

On a wing and a prayer

Priest 3D → Sony Pictures Home Entertainment → All Region Blu-ray

Anyone looking for a dose of no-nonsense popcorn thrills this Autumn should check out the post-apocalyptic vamps-vs-vicars epic, *Priest*, which gets released on 3D Blu-ray on September 5. The latest flick from SFX whiz, Scott Charles Stewart, is ready to rock your viewing room with a 5.1 DTS-HD Master Audio mix and MVC-encoded stereoscopic visuals. Paul Bettany, Karl Urban, Maggie Q and Brad 'Voice of Chucky' Dourif top the scenery-chewing cast list.
No word on extra features yet from distributor Sony Pictures.



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Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Battle of names

The long-gestating prequel to Frank Miller's *300* has had a name change forced on it. Rather than *Xerxes* (the name Miller's comic will be using), the studio has opted for the much more straight-to-DVD sounding *300: Battle of Artemisia* instead.

Heroes set to return



Sci-fi superhero *Green Lantern* may have struggled to overcome negative reviews and audience antipathy at the US box office, but that's not stopping Warner Bros. from pressing ahead with a sequel. Meanwhile, Marvel Studios has announced July 26, 2013 release date for the sequel to the comic book hit *Thor* – although Kenneth Branagh will not be returning to direct.

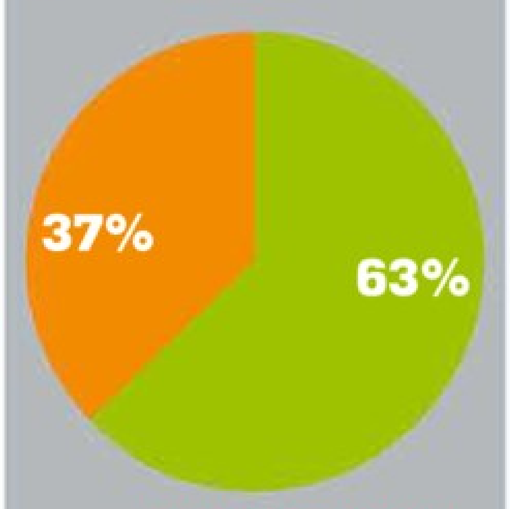
Knights who say no

US cable company Starz is citing 'significant production challenges' as the reason why it's opted not to move forward with a second season of *Camelot*. We think that all of the bad reviews might also have played a part.

We asked...

Have you used a 'room EQ' system to improve the sound of your setup?

- Yes - 63%
- No - 37%



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

CEDIA show embraces 3D

Bigscreen demos and home automation dominate UK expo

Regardless of any concerns people might harbour given the current economic climate, the Pro install and smart home industry was out in force at London ExCeL for this year's CEDIA Home Technology Event trade show.

This annual exhibition mixes training seminars with a hall floor that's packed with hardware, and services, from AV brands big and small. Naturally, *HCC* was in attendance – and came away convinced that the custom install industry is taking 3D very seriously.

Bigscreen thrills certainly weren't in short supply, with Sony, JVC and SIM2 all showcasing their 3D projectors in purpose-built demo rooms. First impressions of Sony's VPL-HW30ES projector – from demos using the 3D Blu-ray release of *Avatar* and the stereoscopic PS3 game *Motorstorm Apocalypse* – were favourable. Images were unblighted by distracting ghosting, and packed plenty of depth and clarity – it's clear that this sub £3K PJ provides Sony with more ammunition in its battle with JVC, and will deliver plenty of 3D bang for your bucks.

The same can't necessarily be said of Panasonic's 152in 3D plasma behemoth, which was making its first appearance at the CEDIA event. While the TH-152UX certainly dazzled with its image quality and has set a new record for the world's largest 3D plasma display, it's hard not to think that most buyers would probably be better off using a projector for home cinema on this scale – especially as Panasonic's display has a price tag of £550,000.



CEDIA crowds: Installers were there to pick up new tips and tricks from industry players



Came, saw, conquered

Away from the 3D demos (see page 9 for more on SIM2's Lumis 3D-S), home and system automation featured heavily. Here, industry leader Crestron was showcasing its Prodigy line-up (pictured above), which aims to provide affordable, simplified home and entertainment control for those looking to taking their first steps into the smart home world, thanks to the fact it doesn't require expensive installation. It is, however, scaleable, and can be expanded into a full Crestron system.

Meanwhile, newcomer Came UK was introducing itself to the CI industry. Having made its name in what a spokesman described as 'gate automation, that sort of thing', the company has now acquired an Italian OEM company and is moving into home automation with a range of touch panel screens (available in four sizes between 6.4 and 12.1in) and its impressive looking modular Hei (Home evolution idea) device communication protocol. In a canny move sure to endear it to prospective users, the company is also promising to have an iPad control app for the system available via iTunes by September.



New Sony: The VPL-HW30ES 3D projector made its UK bow



Touchpanel screens, once the preserve of sci-fi, are the control panels of today

High-end BD

Elsewhere on the show floor Scandinavian brand Primare's long-rumoured BD32 Blu-ray player finally surfaced. This 3D-compatible high-end disc-spinner offers playback of SACD and DVD-Audio, audiophile components, and is expected to finally hit retail in August priced upwards of £3,000.

Perhaps even more eye-catching were the NEOD (New Era of Device) mirror TVs. Created in Italy, the range employs what it calls 'a masterstroke of design innovation', which places a Loewe display behind a mirror-like glass surface, so that when it's turned off it becomes reflective like a mirror. Prices for these designer pad icons start at around £4,500.

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...

News x10

1 Blade runners

Speaker specialist KEF is celebrating its 50th anniversary in style this month with the release of its £20,000 KEF Blade speakers! Available in gloss white, black and a host of wacky custom colours, the Blade uses Single Apparent Source technology, which 'forms a seamless point source driver array handling the entire frequency range'. Sounds pretty nifty...



2 Esteemed Sony

Despite a tough start to the year, after the much-publicised hacking of its PlayStation Network, Sony still ranks as the 'most valued' brand in Asia, beating Samsung, LG, Panasonic and Canon, according to the results of a survey by market research firm, TNS.

3 Xbox strategy

Microsoft plans to reposition Xbox as a more general entertainment brand. As much as 40 per cent of activity on the Xbox 360 is related to non-game entertainment, according to the company. Corporate vice president, Frank Shaw, claims that the console sees an average of 30 hours of 'video consumption' per month, although these figures probably relate only to North America, and are primarily indicative of use of the Netflix movie downloading service.

4 3D PJ on the way

It's been 18 months since we last saw a new projector from Panasonic, but the company has confirmed that it will be launching a replacement for the PT-AE4000 later this year. Dubbed the PT-AT5000, details are currently thin on the ground, but a Panasonic suit told us that the latest 3D model 'has been developed in collaboration with Panasonic AVC Networks' Emotive Technology Development Centre and Panasonic Hollywood Laboratory engineers, who have taken key roles in meeting industry standards for 3D.'

5 Smarter app

Samsung has launched a Smart View app that enables users to share content between their Samsung Smart TV and mobile devices. Currently available for the Samsung Galaxy S II, the free app works by displaying the content from the TV on the mobile device's screen over a home's wi-fi network. Simultaneously, other users could be watching TV, a movie from their Blu-ray player or content from their camcorder.

6 Film studio plans re-brand

In a move to cement its standing as Europe's largest film studio and consolidate its various European affiliates, StudioCanal (owner of the third largest film library in the world) has announced that from 1 September, it will be re-branding British distributor Optimum Releasing and German affiliate Kinowelt with its own moniker.

7 3D VoD gets a global grip

Samsung has announced that its 3D video-on-demand service notched up a pretty impressive one-million content views in just three months. According to the manufacturer, this means that 3D VOD content is accessed an average of 10,000 times a day by worldwide users of the brand's smart TVs.

8 Globe treater

As consumers wait for a manufacturer to take the lead with OLED TVs, Mitsubishi is still exploring other possibilities for the technology over in Japan. To celebrate the Tokyo Science Museum's 10th anniversary, the company created a 6m OLED globe (covered by 10,000 96x96mm OLED panels) that displays a composite image of Earth recorded by weather satellites.

9 Look mum, no glasses!

Panasonic marketing manager Andrew Denham believes that the company's first glasses-free 3D displays will be on the market 'within five years'. Speaking at Intellect's Consumer Electronics 2011 show, he added, 'it's getting better. But we won't solve it with lenticular displays [as used by Toshiba]... You can't get there without hurting the 2D experience at the moment.'

10 Power greedy 3D

Transformers: Dark of the Moon director Michael Bay spent the run up to the release of his 3D blockbuster appealing to cinema owners not to spoil the experience for viewers. Bay claims that cinemas are dimming the 3D projector bulbs to make them last longer and save money, spoiling the 3D effect.



Web chat

Panasonic's plans for a 'connected future' have dominated discussion on the *HCC* website...

Wrong direction



'I am seriously laughing at all of these hardware manufacturers creating their own clouds. Has no one been paying attention to the PSN fiasco? Running such things takes a lot of competency that Panasonic doesn't have (as Sony didn't have). These guys should start pressurising Google and Microsoft to create a new unified white-label platform with branded environments.'

Bandwidth limit

'Internet TV is all well and good when you have excellent uncapped bandwidth on usage. I have BT broadband and there is a monthly limit on data of 10GB. Fine if you're downloading movies or emails, but I'm not going to get too many HD movies or shows out of that. Considering I also have an Xbox 360, which (if I want to download a demo) will clock up just over 1GB each time. How the hell am I going to be able to watch online HD movies, let alone 3D HD movies without hitting my 10GB cap in about three days?'

You're having a laugh

'At present, if you live in a town and have access to cable, you're okay. If you have to rely on copper (as I do) and the exchange is more than a couple of miles away, this is just not going to work. And our government want to ensure that every household has at least 2MB broadband when other countries are rolling out 500MB or in some places up to 1GB! '

Cloud cuckoo land

'I agree, Panasonic should stop dreaming about the future and concentrate on getting this year's models working properly. I'm looking at Sony for my next TV. They can't do the black level, but at least they work and have proper frame creation software.'

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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson gets to imagine he's Steve McQueen when he rigs up an inexpensive home cinema in a tent at Le Mans

I am not a man for the cheap seats. Like Oscar Wilde, 'I have the simplest of tastes. I am always satisfied with the best'. But, just last month, I decided to assemble an ultra budget AV system for a very unique event. Ten of us were heading for a camp site inside the Le Mans motor racing circuit for the 24-hour race. I saw the opportunity for full-phat movies and gaming.

The home cinema room was to be a large gazebo and power duties were limited to a compact 800W petrol generator. Clearly this excluded high current megawatt amps. Moreover, as gazebos are not known for their security, I didn't want to bring along any expensive review kit, lest manufacturers knock me off their Christmas card list for losing their gear.

The gazebo's large white side panels were begging for a projector, and their inherent ability to be locked in the boot of a car when not in use ticked all the boxes. I braced for high second-hand values on eBay, but not so. Amazingly enough, I found a mint condition Hitachi 720p home cinema projector with only 700hours on the lamp and won the auction at just £175. Bargain!

Happy HDMI meal

It was also rather wallet-warming to discover that AVRs without HDMI inputs change hands for the price of a meal out for two. I connect the source to the projector directly via the video connection and secured an old but gold Sony 5x100W Dolby Digital receiver for audio duties for just £50.

Speakers took a little more head scratching. They needed to be compact, so they could be fixed to the gazebo's upright poles, yet potent enough to drown out the noise of the race and the 69,990 drunk and noisy Brits camping in the same field. I acquired a second-hand Acoustic Energy Aego T-System for £200, complete with sub and finished in room-matching white.

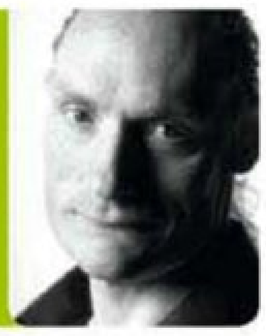
My aging PlayStation 3 was called in to duty as source for Blu-rays and games, and could likewise go in the boot between sessions. Having spent just over £400 all-in for an AVR, speakers and big screen display, I wasn't exactly expecting performance miracles. Still, the 3-tonne trailer full of beer would probably dampen my reviewing senses anyway.

Deep in France, in the half light of dusk and with the projector's menu screen filling the full 4m width of the gazebo wall panel, I could see we were going to have a bit of bother. The panel wasn't hanging flat and its glossy plastic surface was causing serious bright patches. My slightly intoxicated assistants duly stretched and gaffer-taped it between the uprights, as I set up the sound system with ever diminishing hopes of success. The drumming of rain on the plastic sheet roof added to the background cacophony of howling race cars, hundreds of over-worked generators and slurred mass-acapella versions of *My Way* and *Whole Lotta Rosie*. It was hard to imagine how any location could be worse for home cinema!

Four hours later, I was having the most fun I have had with an AV system for decades! The amp and speakers went plenty loud, the sub sounded fine even as its twin drivers hit the limiters for hours on end and the darkness meant the bright patches on the screen were not a major issue. Playing big-screen Gran Tourismo 5 racing around the Le Mans circuit while at the Le Mans circuit with cars racing around us, was an utterly sublime experience, shared with the best of friends, laughing and revelling till sun-up.

Like Oscar, 'I can resist everything but temptation', yet I have learned to adore simple pleasures. All I need now is to get arrested for indecent behaviour and my homage to Wilde will be complete

What's your view about cinema under canvas or outdoors? Let us know by e-mailing hcc@futurenet.com



Richard Stevenson is working on his epigrammatic wit, but after several bottles of beer he tends to forget how to be an Edwardian gent

ILLUSTRATION: BY TEKURA MAEVA

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DVD ADDICT

So much for Blu-ray preserving a filmmaker's vision. **The Beek** is appalled to find that the wrong aspect ratio is the ruination of many a movie even now

This month I find myself discussing a subject I would have thought had been put to bed years ago – aspect ratios. Strangely, even in the day and age of true film enthusiast formats like Blu-ray, studios are still releasing films that are not presented in the aspect ratio the director intended for them.

It's now 25 years since CIC Video made history with its widescreen VHS release of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and 21 years since 20th Century Fox followed with widescreen versions of *Alien*, *Die Hard* and the original *Star Wars* trilogy. From that point on the market seemed to explode and by the mid-'90s the majority of new releases were being offered in both widescreen and fullscreen VHS variants. Doing this enabled the studios to charge a premium to see the film as it was meant to be seen, while pandering to the mass-market who simply didn't want black bars on their TVs.

The arrival of DVD in 1997, along with 16:9 TVs and digital movie channels, quickly led to a major change in the perception of and availability of films in widescreen. But, while the majority of movies released on the format were presented in their original aspect ratio, every now and again a film would turn up cropped in a visually compromised 4:3 format.

The past five years have seen AV enthusiasts shift their gaze from DVD to Blu-ray, a format that was actively promoted by hardware manufacturers and studios alike as one that preserved 'the director's artistic vision', presenting films as they were meant to be seen. And yet, if you head over to our review of Warner Home Video's Blu-ray release of *Ironclad* on p89 you'll see that the original 2.35:1 cinematography has been clumsily hacked down to 16:9 for the disc.

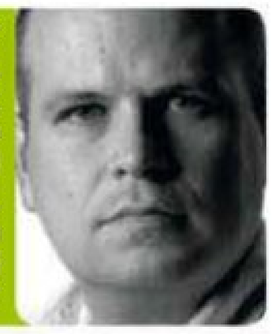
This isn't the first time that the UK arm of Warner Home Video has done something like this, either. The company originally had John Carpenter's latest chiller *The Ward* scheduled for a DVD and Blu-ray release on May 16, but when review copies were sent out a month prior to that, I immediately spotted that the film was presented in 16:9, not Carpenter's preferred 2.35:1. A quick comparison with the trailer enabled me to confirm that the Blu-ray release was an open matte version of the original 2.35:1 photography, which completely ruined the filmmaker's compositions.

Warner bother

Naturally, I immediately contacted Warner about the problem, only to hear nothing back for the best part of three weeks. Then, some 10 days before the disc was due to be released, a spokesperson for the studio got in touch stating that Warner had known about the fault all along, and had always planned to delay the disc until October so that it could do a version in the correct aspect ratio. The studio had just never bothered to tell anybody about its plans until now...

Ironclad, like *The Ward*, is an exception from the majority of Warner's Blu-ray releases, which are basically repackaged versions of existing American releases. These two films have yet to be released in the US, so all of the work on them has been produced specifically for the UK market. This makes me wonder if the UK arm of Warner Home Video simply hates the 2.35:1 aspect ratio and wishes that everything was 16:9 instead. The only other possibility is a significant lapse in quality control at some point in asset management during the development of the discs. If that were the case, I'd recommend Warner UK hires somebody with a bit more passion and knowledge for the job. The studio knows where to find me

If you're annoyed by aspect ratio tampering, tell us about it. Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com



Contrary to what he may have said, **Anton van Beek** is not allowed to jump ship and work for Warner. We won't let him – who else would make the tea?

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Demo screen



Clive Owen guns for the hearts of home cinema lovers everywhere with **Shoot 'Em Up**





Shoot 'Em Up

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Roughly halfway into writer/director Michael Davis' 2007 madcap action comedy *Shoot 'Em Up*, Paul Giamatti's sadistic hitman, Mr Hertz, is asked why he doesn't hang back during a raid on the hero's hideout. 'The leader who stays in the rear, takes it in the rear,' replies Hertz. 'Besides, violence is one of the most fun things to watch.'

While his point about leaders and their rears is dubious, every self-respecting home cinema fan will be nodding along to his subsequent words of wisdom – extreme bouts of cinematic violence provide good workouts for your cinema system.

The blood-soaked *Shoot 'Em Up* is full of such sequences, delivering a cartoonish string of gun-related action scenes. But it reaches new heights of lunacy with the skydiving scene we're offering up here.

Over the top

Now, some of you may wonder why we've chosen to focus on a sequence that is so completely unrealistic. If so, you're obviously a humourless killjoy who can't see beyond some slightly iffy blue screen effects. The rest of us can enjoy the thrill of watching Clive Owen (on brilliant form) dispatch a bunch of hired soldiers while plummeting out of a plane, accompanied by the throbbing riffs of AC/DC's *If You Want Blood (You've Got It)*.

Lasting a little under two minutes, this whirlwind of action offers a real treat for Blu-ray buyers. The VC-1 2.40:1 1080p imagery delivers searing colours and remarkable detailing (when Davis' camera is stationary long enough for you to take it in) that really makes the onscreen action come alive.

And just as impressive is the disc's DTS-HD MA 7.1 audio. Admittedly, it's not a native 7.1 mix, but opening the audio up into the extra channels provides even more cohesive panning as the wind whips past you and bullets streak through the air. It's blistering stuff that'll leave you on an adrenaline-fuelled home cinema high

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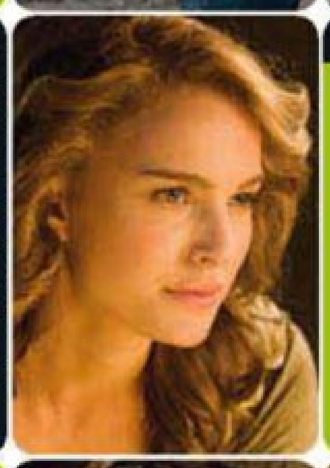
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Tech diary



Smurfs 3D: Blue creatures that pre-date *Avatar* get the stereoscopic treatment

The world of AV and film changes fast. **Our calendar** is here to make sure you don't miss out

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				**29** JUL **Captain America: The First Avenger** The next piece of Marvel's Avengers jigsaw arrives as WWII superhero Captain America makes his big screen bow at UK cinemas today www.paramountpictures.co.uk	**30** **Flowers and Trees** Released on this day in 1932, the award-winning Walt Disney 'Silly Symphony' cartoon *Flowers and Trees* made history as the first commercially released film to be released in three-strip Technicolor	**31** **Pulp fiction** Legendary pulp icon The Shadow made his debut on this day in 1930 as the mystery narrator on the *Detective Story Hour* radio show. Within a year he was the star of his own magazine
1 AUG **Limitless** Today sees the UK Blu-ray release of this fast-paced thriller, with Bradley Cooper starring as a writer who discovers a secret, brainpower-increasing drug www.entertainmentone.co.uk				**5** **Super 8** Finally arriving at UK cinemas this Friday is JJ Abrams' decidedly Spielbergian sci-fi flick about a group of young kids investigating some creepy goings on www.paramountpictures.co.uk		
8 **Your Highness: Extended Edition** Gross-out gags, bad language and Natalie Portman in a bikini come together in this fantasy spoof arriving on DVD and BD in the UK today www.entertainmentone.co.uk		**10** **The Smurfs 3D** This Wednesday sees the tiny blue creatures reborn as a modern, 3D family blockbuster at cinemas across the UK. The trailer is awful, but surely the film can't be all bad? Maybe it can... www.sonypictures.co.uk		**12** **Rise of the Planet of the Apes** Fox is monkeying around with its popular sci-fi franchise once again, this time looking at how the apes took over the Earth. Catch it from today at UK cinemas www.fox.co.uk	**13** **Happy Birthday** Influential filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock was born on this day in 1899. In a career that spanned more than 50 years, he pioneered many of the techniques the suspense and thriller genres now take for granted	**14** **Pirate Radio** The UK Marine Broadcasting Offences Act became law on this day in 1967, making the participation in offshore pirate radio illegal. It was repealed 39 years later by the introduction of the Wireless Telegraphy Act
15 **Source Code** Duncan Jones followed up his lo-fi hit *Moon* with this time-jumping action thriller starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Michelle Monaghan. Unravel its mysteries as it hits DVD and BD in the UK today www.optimumreleasing.com			**18** **Lolita** Vladimir Nabokov's controversial novel was first published in the US on this day in 1958. It's been adapted twice for the cinema – in 1962 by Stanley Kubrick and in 1997 by Adrian Lyne	**19** **Cowboys & Aliens** Jon Favreau ditches *Iron Man* for a very different comic book adaptation. Opening at UK cinemas, this sci-fi western stars Daniel Craig, Harrison Ford and Olivia Wild www.paramountpictures.co.uk		
22 **Red Riding Hood** Amanda Seyfried stars in this new take on *Little Red Riding Hood* set in a medieval village plagued by a werewolf. Track it down on DVD and Blu-ray from today in the UK www.warnerbros.co.uk			**25** ***HCC* #199** Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed to the gills with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and full-on software reviews www.homecinemachoice.com			

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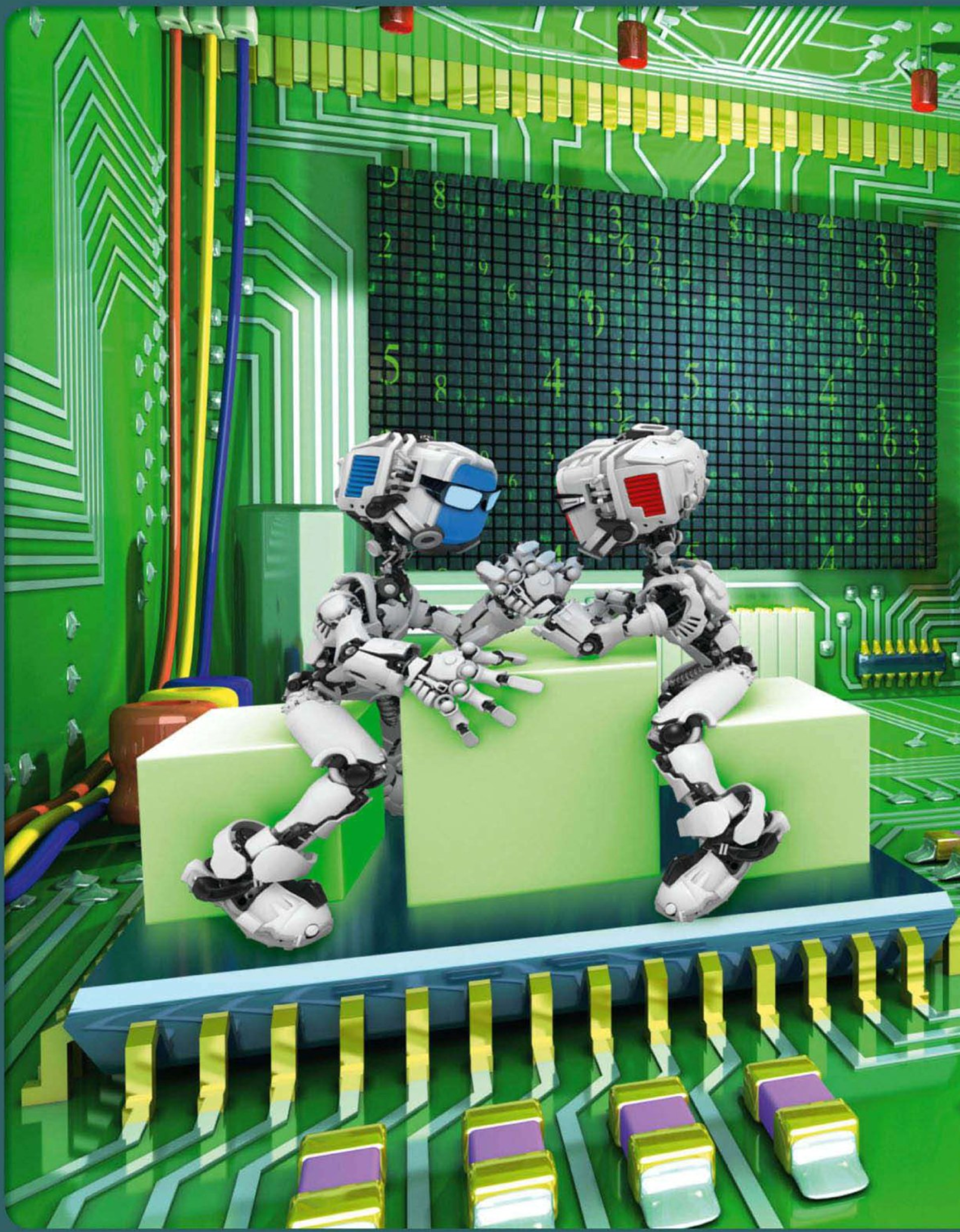
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3D FIGHT CLUB

The world's biggest TV makers are backing different 3D technologies. Active Shutter and Passive Polarisation – which one should you buy? **Steve May** referees

During 2010 around 120,000 3DTVs were sold in the UK. All of them used Active Shutter 3D glasses. With every TV maker offering the same tech, it seemed as if 3DTV had arrived with a *de facto* standard from the word go. AV enthusiasts, still smarting from the HD DVD/Blu-ray debacle, could relax.

But nothing is ever that simple. Today two rival 3DTV systems are vying for your plastic and there's talk of more to come. During the first three months of 2011, another 100,000 next-gen sets were sold and a significant number do not use the Active Shutter system.

While Sony, Samsung and Panasonic all back Active Shutter 3D, LG has opted to refine Passive Polarising technology. Unlike the former tech, which requires shuttering LCD glasses to create a 3D image, Passive puts the onus on the TV to sort out the stereoscopic filtering, leaving the viewer free to wear the sort of inexpensive lightweight spex that get left on cinema seats.

LG first introduced its game-changing Cinema 3D Passive TVs at the 2011 CES tech extravaganza in Las Vegas. Branding rival Active Shutter 3D a health hazard ('likely to induce dizziness, headaches and nausea'), LG urged other TV vendors to rally behind the Passive flag. Philips and Toshiba have since joined the Passive camp, and LG is still courting others.

CYBER ROOM: ©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/KONSTANTIN INOZEMTSEV
3D ROBOTS: ©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/HIGYOU



What has followed is the biggest technology squabble in consumer electronics since the format war between HD DVD and Blu-ray. So how do the rival 3D systems differ?

Getting active

Active Shutter 3D TVs require the corresponding glasses, which incorporate LCD lenses that sync to alternating frames on the TV. Early Active screens shipped with a separate transmitter, which beamed sync pulses to the glasses. For 2011, all Active TVs have the transmitter built in.

The strength of the Active Shutter technique is that it can deliver a full HD 1080p image to each eye – hence full HD 3D. What's bad is that some (but not all) glasses are cumbersome to wear and expensive to buy, ranging from £50 to £130 a pair. Given that many 3D ready Active Shutter TVs now ship without spex and require you to invest in them as an optional accessory, that's quite an overhead for a family of four.

One crucial tactical error made by the Active Shutter alliance is that no standard for Active glasses was agreed prior to launch. Consequently, if you have a Panasonic 3DTV, you'll need Panasonic glasses. There's no point in your mates bringing their Sony Active spex to your house to watch the 3D footie. They won't work.

By comparison, Passive 3D TVs adopt a relatively simple, low-tech approach. The latest TV panels developed by LG include a filter with alternating horizontal and vertical stripes, separated by black, picture-blanking bars. When viewed through glasses with corresponding polarising lenses, alternate frames are presented to each eye to create a 3D image.



Don't chuck me away: While Passive 3D has become known for its cheap, disposable spex, you can get designer pairs, like these from Vizio

Crucially, these polarising glasses are cheap to make. LG is bundling seven pairs with every Cinema 3D screen it sells. You can even watch Passive 3D TVs at home with the same 3D bins used in most cinemas and pubs.

The catch with the Passive solution is that the system reduces the resolution of the displayed 3D image. A full HD 3D Blu-ray picture, which is fed from a player at 1920 x 1080 resolution (per eye), is presented on the Passive screen with 1920 x 540 pixels (per eye). Sky 3D transmissions, which are transmitted in a 1920 x 540 resolution side-by-side format, appear on a Passive screen at 960 x 540.

Clear evidence?

LG's Product and consumer marketing manager, George Mead, says **the resolution drop doesn't matter because there's clear evidence consumers prefer the Passive approach**. 'We've become the fastest growing brand in the 3D space,' he told *HCC*, adding, 'In Korea, Samsung were dominating 3D TV sales, but we've reversed the market with our Cinema 3D proposition. The technology is also proving a huge success in the States.'

And according to BSkyB's chief engineer and 3D guru, Chris Johns, Sky's own consumer research also indicates a consumer preference for Passive technology.

'We carried out consumer testing with both Active and Passive LCD, as well as Active plasma and 80 per cent of those interviewed preferred the Passive option. They honestly did.'

However, Johns concedes that Active Shutter delivers the best picture quality: 'If you're an

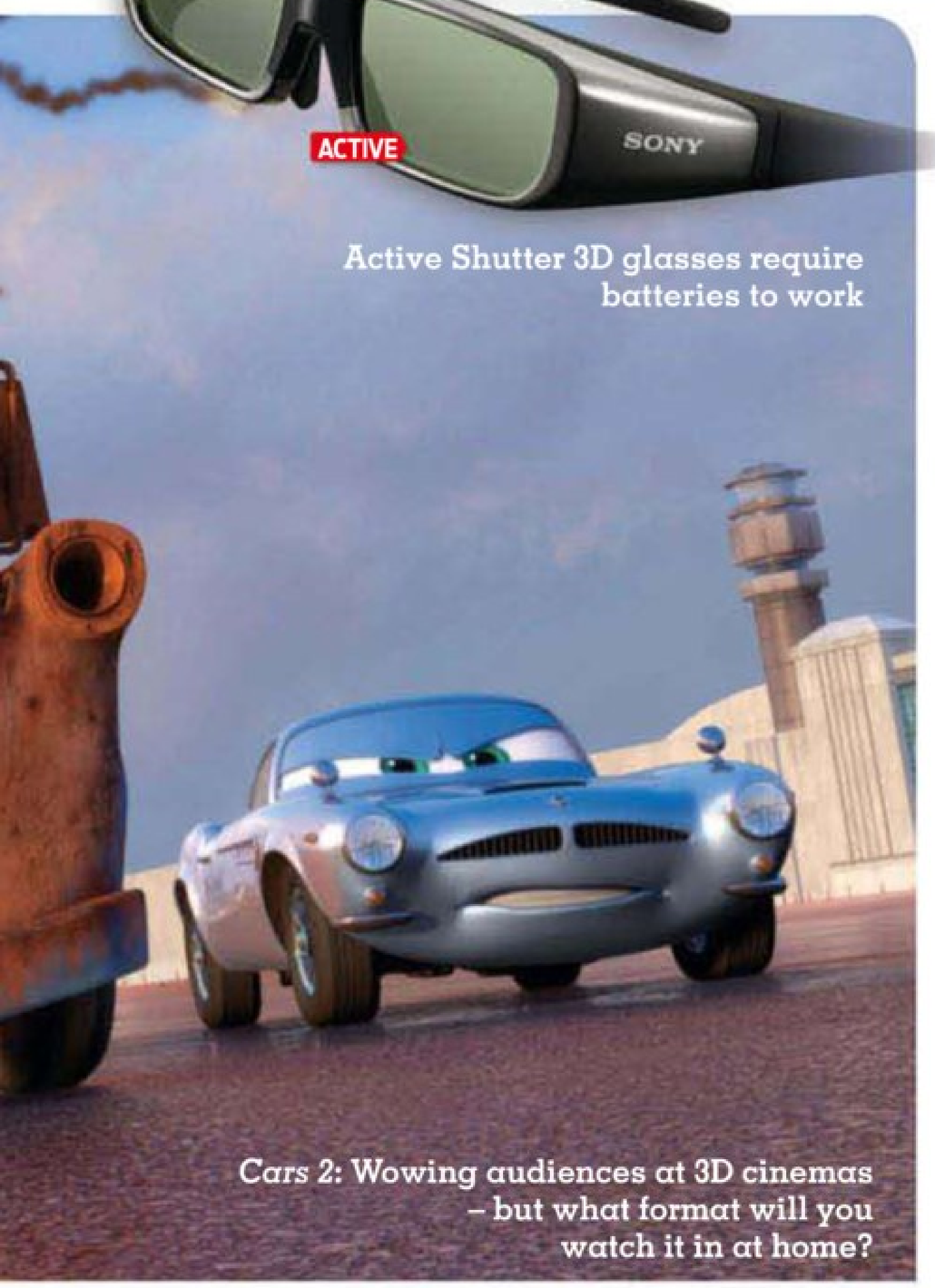


Passive preference: Sky's Chris Johns says consumers prefer Passive 3DTVs



Active activist: Panasonic's Masayuki Kozuka favours Active Shutter

Storedmags.com



Active Shutter 3D glasses require batteries to work

Cars 2: Wowing audiences at 3D cinemas – but what format will you watch it in at home?

AV purist, I can see that you would want the improved resolution.'

Panasonic concurs. Masayuki Kozuka who heads up R&D for Panasonic's Media and Content Alliance office at the PHL authoring centre in Hollywood, says 'only Active Shutter can deliver a full HD 3D picture from Blu-ray.'

The future of 3D

For some, neither Active Shutter nor Passive Polarisation are good enough because both require the viewer to use 3D glasses. They argue that the ultimate future of 3D is autostereoscopic. Toshiba is leading this race to usher a glasses-free 3D viewing experience into the home; it recently pledged to bring a large screen Auto-3D TV to market within the year.

Sky's Chris Johns is a believer, up to a point: 'I think Auto-3D could become the standard way of watching 3D on screens up to about 26ins,' he suggests. 'But I don't think the technology is there for bigger sets.'

Meanwhile Kevin O'Neil, head of VOD at Virgin Media, believes that 3D needs a glasses-free experience sooner rather than later. '3D should be a glass-less experience in the home as soon as possible.'

Perhaps the real future of 3D at home is a fusion of today's Active Shutter and Passive technologies. Samsung recently inked a deal with 3D pioneers RealD to develop a new generation of 3D screens that combine the best of both worlds – full HD resolution to each eye – but deliver via lightweight, inexpensive polarising glasses.

So, with more 3DTV formats on the way, the real 3DTV revolution hasn't even begun yet ●

Putting the two formats on trial

Steve May gets up close and personal with 3D





To find out how the two competing 3D formats compare, we staged a side by side shoot-out between LG's Cinema 3D 42 LW650T LED TV and Panasonic's Active Shutter TX-P42GT30 plasma. Our 3D test material comprised Blu-rays of *Tron: Legacy*, *Resident Evil: Afterlife* and *Monsters Vs Aliens*, plus content from Sky's 3D satellite channel and assorted digital test images.

During our comparison, Panasonic's Active Shutter GT30 consistently delivered the sharpest, smoothest 3D image.

The advantages of its full HD 3D presentation were most notable on curving and diagonal edges. The edges of angled buildings were smooth; lines of fine detail were unbroken and small items were unobscured.

By way of comparison, using the same material, LG's 3D images looked rather jaggy. The black bars that break the horizontal and vertical stripes on the FPR (Film Pattern Retarder) filter create easily visible diagonal stepping effects – as shown by the close-up pictures above. The 3D image exhibited a texture not unlike an old-school CRT television.

If our tests are anything to go by, claims by LG that Passive 3D tech can deliver a full HD resolution 3D image seem unfounded. By no stretch of the imagination could its 3D pictures be described as 1080-line resolution.

We also noted that the technologies react differently when it comes to viewing angle and crosstalk. Seen square-on, the LG's Cinema 3D screen performs well. However, move out of the sweet spot vertically and the image distorts, with obvious double imaging.

The Panasonic set, thanks to its fast-reacting new phosphors, exhibited no overt crosstalk, although slouch back on a sofa, tilting your head, and the lenses in the glasses begin to black out.

While Active Shutter edged ahead in our picture quality comparison, the user experience paints a somewhat different picture, which is presumably where Passive 3D scores highly in consumer tests.

The 60Hz frame refresh rate of the Active Shutter glasses caused obvious flicker, particularly when there was a conflicting light source. LG's passive 3D glasses had no such problem.

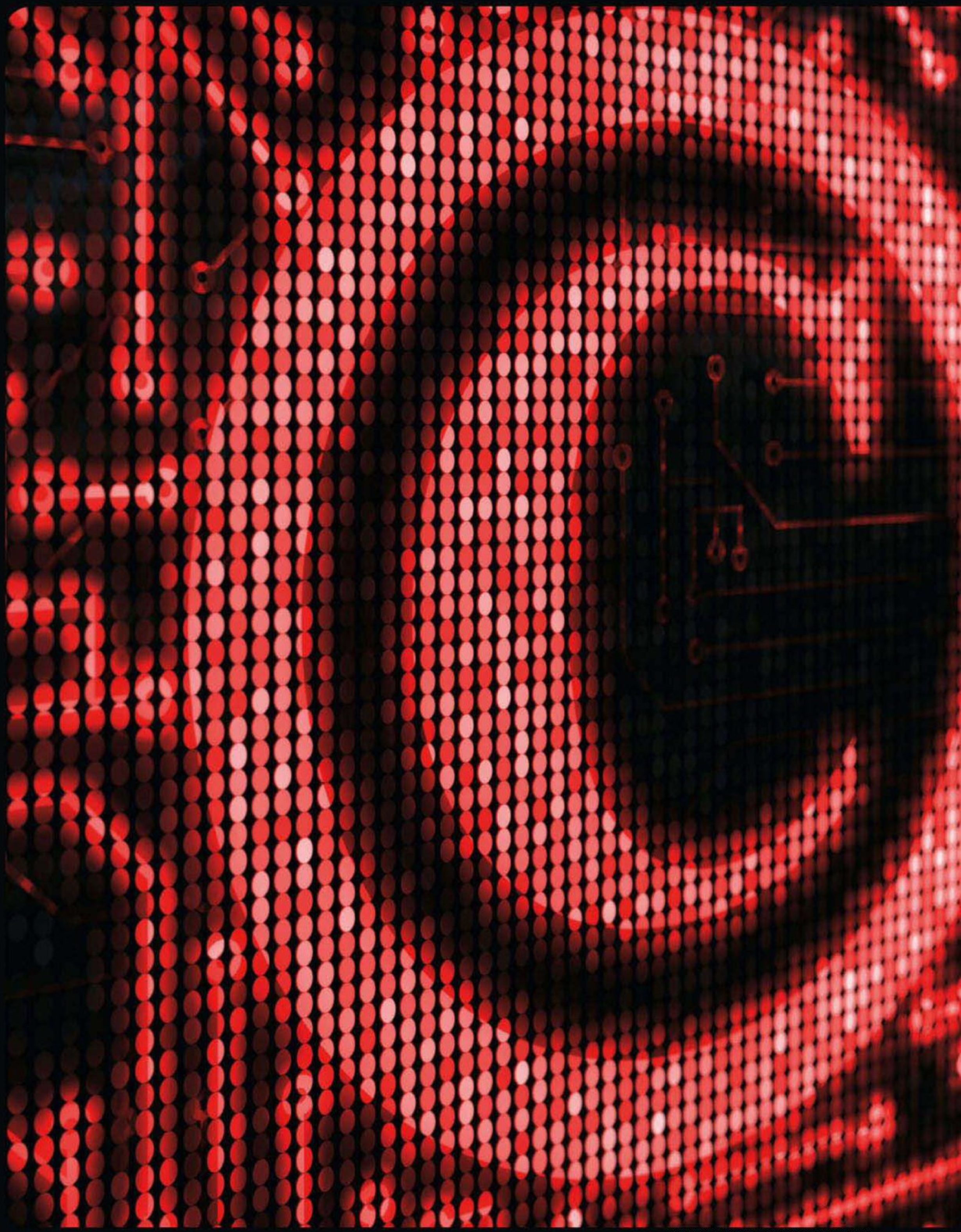
The Active Shutter glasses were also much more uncomfortable to wear and, tellingly, ran out of juice during our trials, and had to be tethered by USB to recharge the batteries.



Format face-off: LG's passive TV (top) did battle with Panasonic's active shutter screen

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Copyright in crisis?

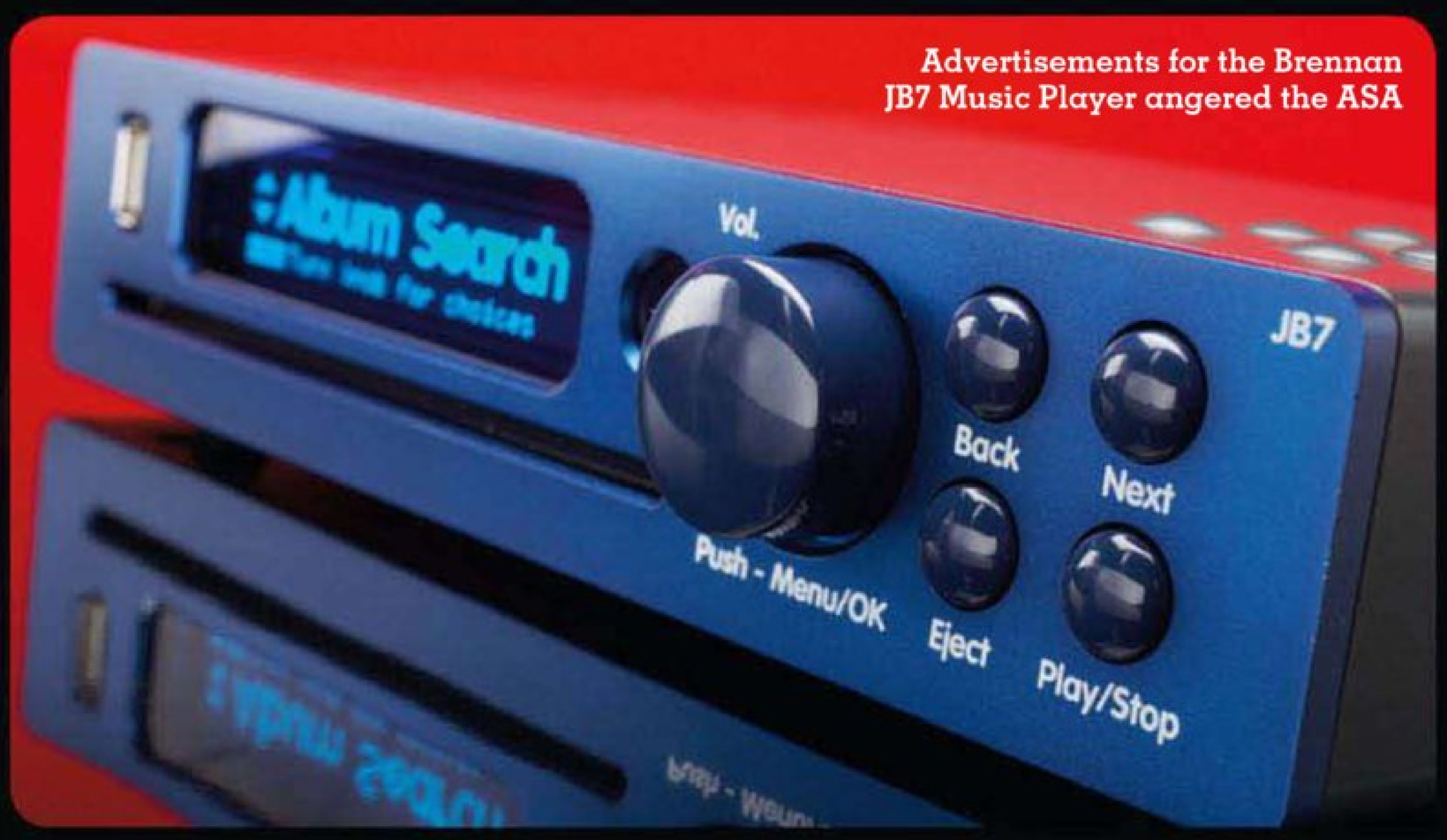
Barry Fox considers whether outdated copyright laws are holding back home entertainment technology

It's official. The law is an ass, and not just because of the super-injunctions handed out to rich people trying to hide their indiscretions. It's also an ass because of the restrictions on copying legitimately purchased music and movies to a multimedia server.

The recently published *Review of Intellectual Property and Growth*, by Professor Ian Hargreaves, grabbed attention by reminding Brits that, while you may cheerfully rip CDs to MP3 players and iPods while the record companies turn a blind eye, doing so is, in fact, illegal.

Prof Hargreaves used the Brennan JB7 Music Player as an example of the nonsensical situation this creates: 'The Brennan JB7 music player is the brainchild of Martin Brennan, a young British entrepreneur. It enables consumers to store music from CDs which they have purchased on its hard disk, making them easily accessible for playing... It is hard to see this product as an undesirable innovation, or to see it as requiring actions any different than those already done by millions of consumers with other digital music players. However the Advertising Standards Authority [ASA] has ruled (understandably, given where the law stands) that advertisements for the Brennan should include a warning that using it involves copyright infringement.'

Brennan was naturally angry at the ASA ruling: 'My company (has had) 10,000 per cent growth in 30 months during the recession, but out-of-date legislation and red tape may sabotage my >



Advertisements for the Brennan JB7 Music Player angered the ASA

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The other solutions

Could the Cloud be about to replace home servers altogether? The studios hope so

Major movie studios have woken up to the idea that buyers want flexibility in how and where they watch their media. An alliance that includes Fox, Lionsgate, Sony, Paramount, Warner and Universal is promoting Ultraviolet, a multi-platform, cloud-based streaming technology, which makes home servers look more than a little antiquated.

Due to launch later this year, the system gives buyers of Ultraviolet-branded media (Blu-ray, DVD or download) 'enduring' rights to access the content on any Ultraviolet compatible device, including PCs, tablets, Smart TVs, BD players, STBs and more. Some hardware will be software upgradeable to the Ultraviolet standard, but newer hardware will have it pre-installed.

Ultraviolet acknowledges that you may want to watch a movie on your Blu-ray player, a laptop, or a portable device, and when the data is digital, why should you have to pay several times for the privilege?

Apple's iCloud service offers similar functions, although it's currently limited to music only; but it will certainly do the same for video soon.

growth. It is no exaggeration to say that this matter has caused me more sleepless nights and wasted days than any other in my company's history. Aside from legal headaches, I face the cost of reassuring customers that record companies will not sue them.'

Hargreaves' report, however, does not even touch on the even more contentious matter of ripping DVD and Blu-ray movies to servers...

Rise of the server

For at least the past 10 years, Microsoft has been banging away at the Media Center concept. According to Gates' gospel, a workhorse Windows PC should also store and play music and movies. The idea has never taken off, perhaps because the wretched thing spends half its life downloading updates, re-booting, fighting off viruses, crashing and generally being a pain in the neck.

But this pantomime has created a booming market for standalone servers, dedicated to serving stored music and movies. And they do it well, despite many obstacles created by the music and movie industries.

When the CD system was launched in 1982/3, it had no copy protection, and the very tight licensing regime run by Philips and Sony stopped anyone messing with the standard to try and add protection. But after the CD patents expired, several specialists (such as Macrovision, the company which had previously developed copy protection for videocassettes) started to experiment by adding spurious computer data to music CDs. In theory, music CD players ignored the data and just played the music, while CD-ROM drives in computers were screwed up when making a digital copy.

In practice some CD players, for instance in cars and high end hi-fis, refused to play the music either.

In late 2005, Sony Music tried a more crafty system called XCP. Computer 'root kit' code buried in a music disc behaves like a computer virus and infects any PC used to copy the disc. This caused such a stink in the USA that none of the 52 infected titles (from high profile artists such as Neil Diamond, Frank Sinatra, Burt Bacharach, Celine Dion and Bette Midler) was released in Europe. Consequently, Sony in the US had to recall 2.7 million unsold discs from retailers, and 2.1 million already sold to consumers, then pay out tens of millions of dollars in consumer fines and compensation to owners of infected PCs.

After the XCP fiasco, no record company has dared to try and copy-protect music CDs, which is why audio server devices such as the Brennan JB7 can work as they do with only a cop-out copyright notice to steer the maker clear of the asinine law.

No disrespect to Brennan, but the acknowledged creator of the multimedia server concept (in the 1990s) is Cambridge-based Imerge, now owned by Prism Media.

The small print in the publicity material for the Imerge MS1-HD server (reviewed by *HCC* last year) contains a similar keep-the-ASA-happy copyright notice about not copying 'without the permission of the copyright owner'. But just how do you ask Walt Disney for permission to watch *Bambi* from a server?

Cracking the codes

When the MS1-HD server was launched, Imerge said, 'the key difference is the new Blu-ray drive, which also allows users to store and playback content from Blu-ray discs. The integral drive reads content from CDs, DVDs and Blu-ray discs to store on hard drives for convenient access.'

This raises technical as well as legal issues. When DVD was launched, the movie industry was desperate to avoid a repeat of the CD copy-freely mistake. So the DVD system uses CSS (the Content Scramble System), which digitally scrambles the signal on the optical disc. The player has embedded secret codes or 'keys' that unscramble the signal as the disc plays.

Panasonic was heavily involved in developing CSS and the keys were deemed so secret that at the company's HQ in Osaka, CSS engineers worked in a locked room that was out of bounds to other company employees.

Yet in 1999, only a couple of years after DVD was launched, a Norwegian student cracked the



Imerge's MS1-HD server (top) and XiVA safe – the flagship product from the media server masters

CSS code and wrote a geeky computer program called DeCSS which lets a home PC make a perfect digital copy of a DVD movie. The basic DeCSS program is now incorporated in many easy-to-use software packages that enable a PC to copy a DVD with a couple of mouse clicks. Some of these packages are available free on the internet while others are sold at modest price.

There is nothing that can be done to defeat DeCSS, because there is no way to change the keys buried in players. So Sony and Macrovision (now called Rovi) separately came up with bolt-ons that work alongside CSS.

Sony's ARccOS (Advanced Regional Copy Control Operating Solution) deliberately corrupts some parts of the DVD bitstream. In theory DVD players play the movie while copy programs make an unplayable copy. In practice some DVD players (including some of Sony's) can't play the disc.

Rovi's RipGuard works by altering the navigation structure of a DVD. The order of scenes is juggled. In theory a DVD player plays them in the correct order, but a copy program is fooled into making a gobbledegook copy.

'Over 1 billion DVDs with RipGuard have shipped in the last three years alone', says Rovi's promo material. The way RipGuard juggles scenes changes from month to month. But paid-for rip programs come with the promise of upgrades to cope with Rovi's changes.

Blu-ray was Hollywood's Big White Hope. It uses a copy-protection system called AACS (Advanced Access Content System) with more encryption keys than DVD. They are better hidden inside the discs and players and, if hacked, can be replaced by new keys buried in movie discs.

But **it took hackers only a few months after Blu-ray's launch to develop software programs that let a home PC copy a Blu-ray movie with a couple of mouse clicks.** Blu-ray copy software is now sold with the promise of updates to cope with AACS key changes.

RealNetworks, the US company behind RealAudio compression, tried selling $30 software called RealDVD that rips copy-protected optical discs to hard disk while copy-protecting the copy. The Hollywood studios won a $4.5million punishment payment. At a conference last year, Colin Dixon, Senior Analyst at research company, TDG Diffusion, said: 'In 2008 there were just two BD ripping programs. Now there are six. The key needed to rip *Avatar* was available before the BD was released.'

Readers will note that we steer clear of naming the copy software now available to copy DVDs and BDs, because both the US and Europe now have laws to deter 'circumvention' of copy protection.

America's DMCA, Digital Millennium Copyright Act, was passed in 1998, and supports draconian fines and even imprisonment for offenders. The EU's Copyright Directive was passed in 2001 and gives governments in Europe generally similar rights to the DMCA.

This sums up the dilemma now faced by the companies selling multimedia servers. They are



offering easy-to-use boxes which let owners of CDs, DVDs and BDs store their content in full quality for more convenient play, but in doing so, break the letter of copyright laws.

Manufacturers are an obvious sitting duck for prosecution, so they sell servers in a legally 'clean' state, without the vital ripping software. It's then up to the buyer to take to obtain and install the software in the privacy of their own homes.

We are not (legally) amused

It might be considered a supreme piece of irony that Prism, owner of Imerge, recently won a Queen's Award for Enterprise – meaning that our monarch is honouring a product that relies on our breaking the law of the land.

Other manufacturers take a different approach. Kaleidescape's M500 Player also copies the owner's Blu-ray Discs, DVDs and CDs onto a hard-disk 'vault', but for Blu-ray play, the physical disc must be present in the drive for the copy to play from the vault. It's an expense and an inconvenience which you would think would make owners wonder why they bother.

But there are signs that a change is in the air. Brennan's campaign to amend the out-dated Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 is gathering steam, and innovative online solutions such as Ultraviolet and iCloud (see the *Other Solutions* box) acknowledge the owner's right to transfer paid-for media to a range of devices.

And, intriguingly, there's now a media server available, which seems to sweep away all the worries and limitations of systems such as Imerge and Kaleidescape. The Evolve system (from www.evolvemedia.eu) includes the lifeStation media player, lifeStore server and lifeStream slave units, and is quite capable of ripping DVD and Blu-ray discs to its hard drive.

But you don't need to keep the original discs in a vault in order to play the ripped versions, and no, you don't have to ask anyone for permission before you do it. When you start to rip a disc, the system reminds you of your copyright obligations, but no more. The honest thing to do, of course, is to keep the discs you've paid for, and put them away safely in the loft.

Treating users as responsible adults is at least a first step to clarifying the copyright conundrum we find ourselves with. Surely it can't be long before other manufacturers follow suit. Inevitably, if common sense prevails, the powers that be will be forced to amend the copyright laws to take into account the potential of this radically new entertainment technology



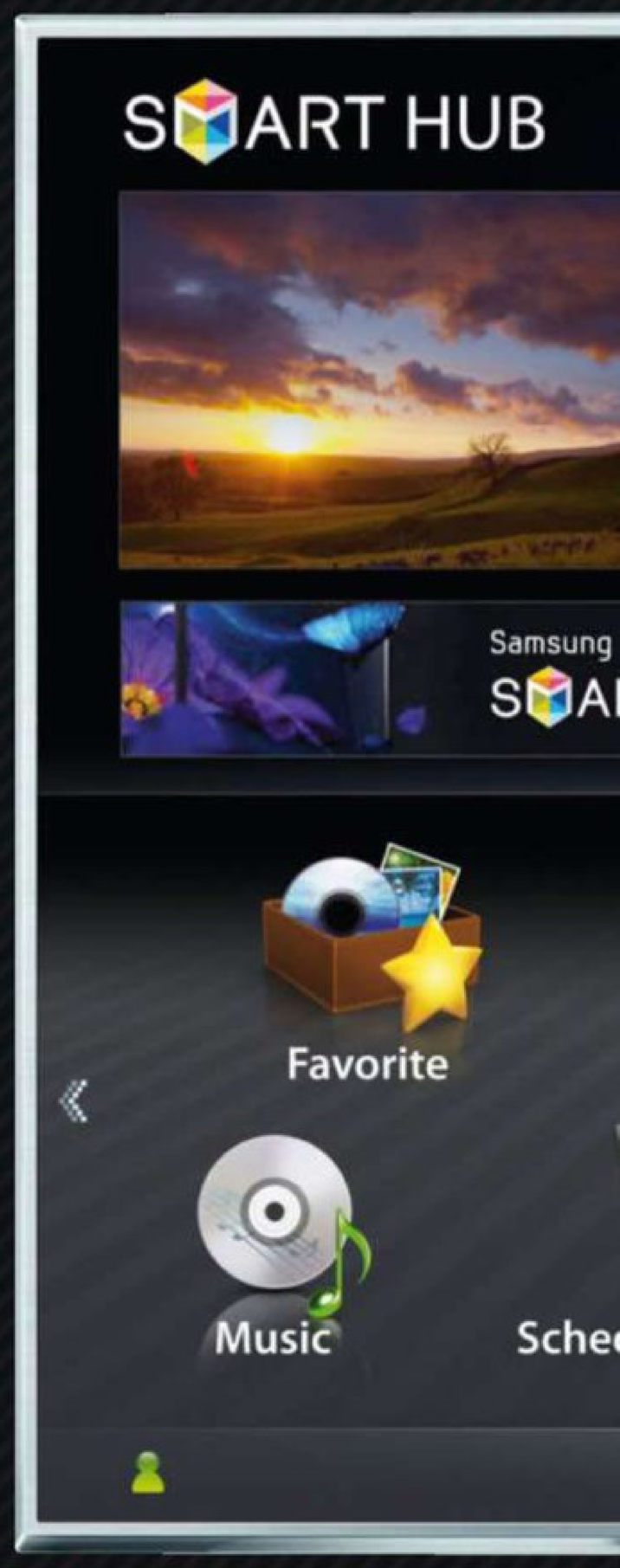
Kaleidescape has a license from the DVD Copy Control Association to remove CSS encryption

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Smart living

With **Samsung Smart technology**, you can watch, chat, surf and share - discover the future of TV here



There's a revolution taking place in the world of home entertainment. With the addition of 'Smart' technology, familiar products such as TVs can offer more features than ever before, including access to the Internet, connectivity to other devices, and the ability to use amazing Apps. Samsung's range of Smart TVs are leading the way in this state-of-the-art technology, which turns your living-room screen into a home entertainment hub, seamlessly integrating your own TV, movies, music and websites.

The beauty of Samsung Smart TVs is that it's so easy to use. All the available services, including web access, Apps, your favourite media and your video files can be selected from a single Smart Hub menu - a fast, animated interface that makes getting the most out of this new technology so simple, the whole family can enjoy it.

Viewers can also choose to link their Smart TV to stylish Samsung Smart Blu-Ray players, as well as to speaker systems and sound bars which deliver high-quality 3D audio to match the 3D HDTV quality of the Smart TV.

Watch

With Samsung Smart TV, you're never short of great entertainment to watch. Thanks to partnerships with leading content providers like LOVEFiLM, BBC iPlayer, YouTube and Acetrax, you can access new movies, TV programmes and video clips whenever it suits you, as well as accessing free 3D video content on demand through the Samsung Explorer 3D App. Finding content is easy too, with Samsung's Search function browsing all available sources, including connected devices like your laptop or smartphone - and with the YourVideo feature, you'll receive intelligent recommendations based on what you and your family like to watch. You'll never find yourself saying there's nothing on the TV again!

Surf

We all love to surf the Internet, but wouldn't it be more fun if you could do it in the comfort of your living-room, on the large screen of your TV? Samsung's continually expanding App centre brings your favourite websites to you in a customised easy-to-navigate widescreen format. BBC iPlayer, YouTube, Google Maps and Twitter, plus a raft of family-friendly games are just some of the great Apps available. Yet Samsung Smart TV doesn't limit you to these high-quality Apps - its built-in web browser, with Flash, favourites and multiple window support, gives you full, unlimited access to the World Wide Web. You can even watch TV and go online at the same time!

Chat

Want to keep friends up to date with what you're watching? Samsung Smart TV lets you do that too, via the Social TV option. Social TV can be overlaid onto your TV screen, so you can keep track of what's going on and watch TV while staying logged into your Facebook, Twitter and Google Talk accounts. Furthermore, by purchasing a camera, you can keep in touch with family and friends via the Skype video call application.

Share

A key part of Samsung Smart TV is AllShare, a DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) technology that lets you stream movies, music and photos from network connected devices to your television - for instance, your home PC or maybe a Samsung Galaxy SII - via a simple-to-use interface. This means that all the family can enjoy home movies and holiday snaps that might otherwise lie forgotten on a computer hard drive. With Samsung's Smart TVs, the future really is here now!



Smart message:
Samsung Smart TV looks great and is easy to use

HOME CINEMA Choice ★★★★★ BEST BUY

Samsung's Smart TV range was awarded three Home Cinema Choice Best Buy awards in June 2011.

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A world of excitement: Samsung Smart TV brings it all home

Smart TV, smart design

Use TV in ways you never have before!

The flagship flatscreen in Samsung's Smart TV range is the UE55D8000, a 55in LED TV which was awarded a full five stars in its review by Home Cinema Choice. Alongside its innovative, integrated Smart Hub feature, this Full HD TV offers best-in-class picture quality with LED backlighting, built-in tuners for both Freeview HD and Freesat HD, true 3D display plus 2D-to-3D conversion, a backlit remote control, and a jaw-dropping design. Samsung's unique One Design styling features a 5mm bezel, so ultra-thin that you forget you are watching aTV, and feel you're really living the on-screen experience. Yes, it's beautiful, but don't forget this TV is smart too!

Samsung SMART TV



Disclaimer: Samsung Smart TV features vary by model. Skype and Web browser not available on Smart LED TVs D5520, D6100 and Plasma Smart TVs D6900. 3D not available on D5520 TV. Camera required to use Skype, available to purchase separately. Which? Award for Best Audio Visual Brand 2011.

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Raise the rafters

Adrian Justins takes a look at a cinema viewing room that started life as an unpromising and oddly-shaped roof space

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→ Kit Checklist

Runco: VideoXtreme VX-3000D DLP projector
Screen Research: 118in 2.40:1 curved auto-masking projector screen
Rainier: Autoscope lens system
Bowers & Wilkins: 4x 802 Diamond floorstanders (front L/R and rear L/R); 4x CT8.4 in-wall (surrounds); 1x HTM2D centre; 2x CT 8SW subwoofer
Classé: 1x SSP-600 surround sound processor
Classé: 1x CA-5100 five-channel power amp; 3x CA-3200 three-channel power amps
Classé: CDP-300 DVD player
Denon: BDP-2010 Blu-ray player
Kaleidescape: 1080p Mini Player
Sky: Sky+HD set-top box
AMX: NXT-CV7 7in wired touchpanel
Fortress Matinee: Cinema seating
Crowson Technology: Tactile transducers
Middle Atlantic: AXS–20 racking

B&W's imposing 802 floorstanders dominate this state-of-the-art cinema

Shropshire-based SMC can have faced few installations as demanding as this fifth-floor den. The AMX-controlled cinema was to be the jewel in the sumptuous crown of a mansion being customised to an exacting standard, but the room's original dimensions, sloping ceiling and acoustics were far from suited for their intended purpose.

In the finished cinema, seating for 12 people has been created by building a two-tier platform, with a *chaise longue* at the front for the ultimate in movie viewing decadence. The rake of the room dictated that a projector with a long throw lens be mounted at the rear of the seats – a Runco VX-3000 was chosen, firing images from Sky HD, a Denon BDP-2010 Blu-ray and Classé CDP-300 DVD deck on to a 118in screen with auto masking. This is needed for the VX-3000's CineWide and AutoScope functions that flawlessly project Hollywood movies in their correct aspect ratio.

Blown away

Acoustics treatments were applied including panel and cavity resonators, and heavy use was made of soft furnishings, including the customised Fortress Matinee seats. All seats are fitted with Crowson Transducers for added rumble to complement the 2,000W of LFE generated by the dual B&W CT8SW subwoofers that have been built within the window dormers – the rest of the 9.2 system uses high-end B&W speakers, too. The result is a theatre that sounds as good as it looks. >



Here's something we'd like to see down at the local multiplex

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Room essentials

A Hooray for Runco
Thanks to Runco's CineWide technology, when switching from 16:9 to 2.35:1 images on the VX-3000 images get wider while full screen height is maintained, eliminating black bars. Nice

B Classé act
Denon's BDP-2010 handles Blu-ray duties whilst DVDs get reference-level treatment aboard Classé's DVD CDP-3000 DVD deck

C Power pack
1,100W of amplification comes courtesy of a five-channel Classé 5100 power amp in conjunction with three equally well-engineered Classé 3200 three-channel models

D The Thin Controller
AMX's 7in Modero combines a small base with an expansive 16:9 aspect ratio for maximum visibility and one-touch operation

E California dreamin'
Hailing from the west coast of the US, Fortress Seating's customised recliners and *chaises longues* feature built-in Crowson Transducers that deliver LFE rumble to their occupants' backsides





All installations by Musical Images

Project into your World IN3D

At Musical Images we have the finest projectors on permanent demonstration – like the brand new DLA-X3B 3D-ready D-ILA projector from JVC with a superb 50,000:1 native contrast ratio.

It features a brand new cabinet design (available in glossy black or white) with centre mounted lens, symmetrical design and rear input terminals that allows for more versatile positioning and mounting.



JVC

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Certified: AV-holic!

Every issue, an **HCC reader** invites you to take a tour of their beloved home cinema setup...







Out of control: AV-holic Phil converted a previous 'junk room' into this hi-tech picture palace

Introduce yourself...
My name is Phil Read, and I am 42 years old.

And you're an AV-holic?
Having spent this much money and time on a dedicated room, and the amount of time I now spend in there, yes, I would probably say I am!

What's in your setup?
I've got a JVC HD350 projector, Onkyo TX-NR905 AVR and a surround system consisting of Mordaunt Short MS914 floorstanders and centre, KEF 5005 surrounds and a BK Monolith Subwoofer. Sources include Virgin V+, PlayStation 3, Apple TV, Marantz CD5004 and a Project Debut 1 Turntable,

What was the last bit of kit you bought?
A Logitech Harmony 1100 remote. I just couldn't get used to it – I previously used a Philips Pronto – so I sold it.

And what's next?
Because of the above, my next purchase will probably be some kind of system, so I can use my iPad to control my setup.

How much have you spent on your AV habit over the years?
Well, this project has cost about £7,000. I used to spend too much, buying the latest equipment as soon as it came out. I once bought a DVD recorder for £750. It now sits unused in the lounge and is probably worth about £20!

What does your family think of the room?
My wife was a bit dubious about me spending so much on this room just to 'watch the occasional movie'. She now spends just as much time as I do in there, watching normal TV too! The kids love the room, especially playing Playstation games on the 8 foot wide screen! I've fitted a code lock to the door to limit their time in there, because given the chance they'd be in there all the time!

What's your current fave disc?
My favourite BD disc is probably *The Dark Knight*. It was one of the first I bought, but it is a great demo disc for the cinema room.

Lastly, what's your view on 3D?
I considered 3D when planning this room, but decided to stick to 2D for the time being. It will keep me happy for a few years, by which time 3D will be the norm, or will it have fizzled out?

Room essentials

A Screen selection
The projector screen is actually a sheet of MDF painted white...

B D.I.Y master
Most of the work was done by our AVholic himself, starting in January and finishing in April. Only the carpet fitting was done by professionals

C PJ convert
Phil admits he was originally 'unsure' about getting a projector, having only ever seen them in pubs 'where light pollution destroys the image'. But he says in his fully darkened room the image is 'stunning'.

D Comfort costs
The leather seating is one of the most expensive aspects of the room. Yet by sourcing some second-hand hardware, the total cost came in under the initial £10,000 budget

Join the club

Do you want to see your home cinema system featured in the pages of *Home Cinema Choice*? If so, log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/avholic where you'll find all the information you need.

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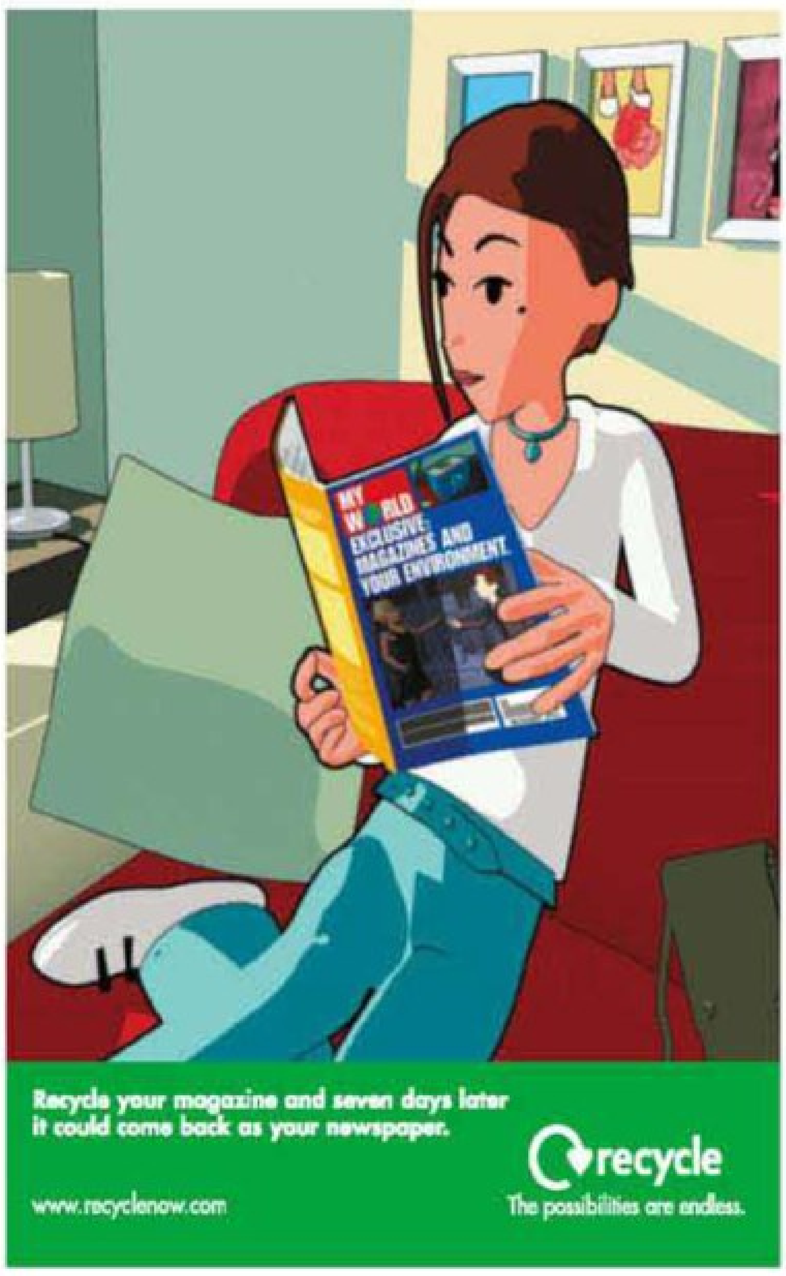
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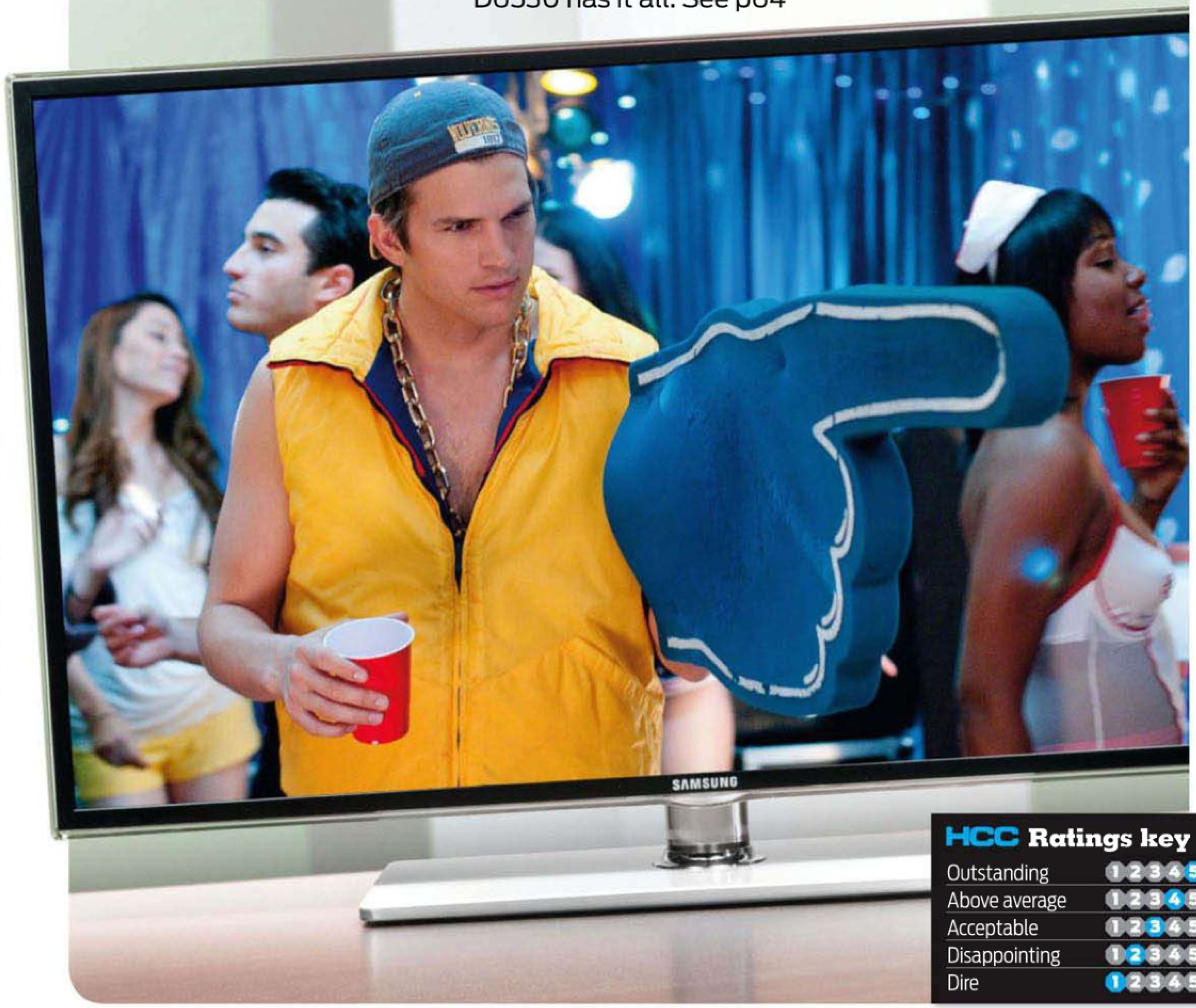
REVIEWS

→Hardware highlights

SAMSUNG Slimline 51in D6900 plasma
DENON Universal 3D Blu-ray player **PANASONIC** 42in entry-level 3D Viera and all-in-one system
TANNOY 5.1 sub/sat system to match your flatpanel TV **INFOCUS** Wallet-friendly DLP projector
DUNE HD Esoteric BD deck **ROUNDUP** Four Smart Blu-ray players go head-to-head **AND MORE!**

Superior LED

Cutting-edge features, catwalk style and pin-sharp pictures – Samsung's 40in D6530 has it all. See p64



HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 **5**
Above average	1 2 3 **4** 5
Acceptable	1 2 **3** 4 5
Disappointing	1 **2** 3 4 5
Dire	**1** 2 3 4 5

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRAISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT – IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

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Smarter and cheaper 3D plasma

If your finances won't run to Panasonic's VT30 series, **John Archer** reckons Samsung's 51-incher is an affordable way to go Smart



Samsung doesn't seem to like plasma very much. Every year, the brand's marketing focuses almost exclusively on its latest LED TVs, while its plasma models sneak into stores with little or no fanfare.

But the appeal of Samsung's plasmas has grown with the advent of 3D, where they've provided three-dimensional pictures far less troubled by crosstalk than any of its LCD displays.

All these qualities and more are present and correct in the good value PS51D6900. In fact, it's comfortably my favourite Samsung plasma yet.

It certainly helps that, despite its size and active 3D capability, the PS51D6900 costs just £1,000 on the high street. That's around £900 cheaper than Panasonic's P50VT30, roughly £600 cheaper than LG's P50PZ950T and about £240 less than the latest prices on Panasonic's P50GT30 3D model. What's more, the PS51D6900 ships with a single pair of free 3D glasses, while the P50GT30 doesn't, so really you need to add an extra £100 to the Panasonic's price before you've got a true comparison. This Samsung, then, is a bit of a bargain.

Design-wise, it looks good, too, with a slender, grey and glass-finish bezel. Not quite as desirable as Samsung's D8000 LED sets, but close.

Connections are par for the course, include four v1.4 HDMIs offering compatibility with full HD 3D sources and two USB ports that can play video, photo or music files from USB devices. The latter can also be used to record TV shows onto USB HDDs from the integrated Freeview HD tuner. A LAN port is on hand for both accessing content on DLNA computers and getting into Samsung's new Smart TV service. Perhaps best of all, though, is the PS51D6900's built-in wi-fi.

Samsung's Smart TV platform is a considerable advance on the brand's previous Internet@TV system. Most welcome is the new 'Smart Hub' interface screen that gives you easy access to not only dozens of apps and video streaming services, but also to all your potential sources, including the TV tuners.

Mighty meaty

The amount of content on the brand's Smart TV platform is becoming truly substantial, too. Established favourites such as LOVEFiLM, the BBC iPlayer, YouTube, the AceTrax movie rental/purchase 'cloud' and Samsung's own 3D 'channel' are all here. The latter service now carries more and the streaming quality has more stability than it did a month or two ago.

As well as the streaming content, Samsung offers around 60 or so 'second-tier' apps, many of which are a bit pointless.

Please note, though, that unlike Samsung's D7000 and D8000 LED sets, the PS51D6900 doesn't provide either an open internet browser or Skype. In Samsung's plasma range, these two features are reserved for the D8000 series.

Calibrating the PS51D6900's images is made straightforward by a combination of a long list of themed presets and an extensive toolset, both of which include colour management and gamma controls.

Samsung doesn't seek endorsements from THX or the Imaging Science Foundation (ISF), but the PS51D6900 would probably have secured the backing of both.

Setup is aided, moreover, by the inspired use of an interactive instructions system that explains what each feature in the menus does when you highlight it.

With the single pair of Bluetooth active shutter 3D glasses perched reasonably comfortably on my nose, I settled down to watch a selection of 3D content, including the *Tangled* Blu-ray and Sky's recent broadcast of Elbow's pre-tour rehearsals. I was mostly impressed with what I saw.

Particularly heartwarming is how little crosstalk there is. In fact, during bright scenes, there's practically no telltale ghosting at all. In this respect, the PS51D6900 improves on the company's 3D LEDs models.

Having said that, the screen's pictures can't be considered crosstalk-free, for the ghosting issue is occasionally apparent during dark >

AV/CV

Product: 51in plasma with active 3D playback and Smart TV features

Positioning: One step down from the top of Samsung's plasma range, below the flagship D8000 series

Peers: Panasonic TX-P50G20; LG 50PZ950T

The Samsung's see-thru bezel and pedestal are a sliver of pure cool

→ Specifications

3D: *YES* plus 2D-3D conversion Full HD: *YES* 1080p24
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD
Component video: *YES* one input
HDMI/DVI: *YES* four, v1.4 PC input: *YES* one D-Sub
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Sound: 2 x 10W Contrast ratio: 'High'
Dimensions (off stand): 1,196(w) x 783(h) x 305(d)mm
Weight: 27kg
Also featuring: '600Hz'; Smart TV online service; USB media playback (MP3, JPEG, HD video support included); DLNA support (with Samsung's AllShare system); integrated wi-fi; colour and gamma management; noise reduction processing; active 3D playback with one pair of glasses included

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Dark stars: Black levels are deep enough to support the naturalism created by fine colour performance

scenes, which have bright elements in them, such as the lantern sequence in *Tangled*. Such scenes can even trouble Panasonic's 3D plasmas a little, but not as much as they do the PS51D6900.

Plasma reigns

The Samsung set's crosstalk issues remain less bothersome than they are with practically every LCD 3D TV, though. And the PS51D6900 also does a good job of reproducing 3D images with decent colour saturations and accuracy. Indeed, I'd say they're slightly brighter and more dynamic looking than those of Panasonic's VT30 series.

Stereoscopic motion is handled surprisingly well, too, considering there doesn't seem to be much going on in the motion processing department.

Turning to 2D material, the PS51D6900 continues to impress. **The highlight remains the clarity of HD footage, which sparkles with detail and texture, yet never takes the sharpness so far that things start to look gritty.**

Colours are vivid but mostly natural too, aside from marginally yellow skin tones, while the set's black level response is deep and natural. To put this latter point into perspective, Panasonic's GT30 and VT30 series both serve up deeper black levels still. But the PS51D6900 does well enough in this key department in order to still look cinematic when required, so the compromise versus the Panasonic models doesn't seem unreasonable given the PS51D6900's affordability.

Another string to the PS51D6900's bow is its standard-definition upscaling. Good quality SD sources look almost HD by the time the PS51D6900 has finished with them, and even quite poor sources look sharper without noise levels being exaggerated.

Console gamers, meanwhile, will be pleased to hear that I measured just 35ms of input lag on the PS51D6900 using its Game preset, which is low enough to cause few, if any, unfair deaths or missed platform jumps.

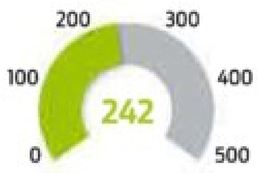
Unlike many previous Samsung TVs, the PS51D6900's slender design doesn't prevent it from producing some solid sound quality to keep its pictures company. There's a reasonably open mid range, bright trebles that seldom, if ever, sound harsh and even a smidgeon of bass around. Blimey.

Awesome contender

The PS51D6900 doesn't usurp Panasonic's GT30 and VT30 models from their position as the best performing 3D TVs around. But it's still a very enjoyable watch, and with some excellent Smart TV features and aggressive pricing it makes it one of the 3D world's biggest bargains to date

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

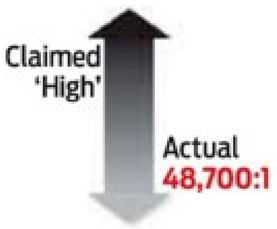


White screen: With our standard 100IRE full white display, power consumption of 242W improves on previous Samsungs



Test footage: With movie footage and full volume sound real world consumption averages 110W

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: Out of the box the contrast ratio measured a respectable 35,000:1, but post calibration yielded 48,700:1 with a luminance of 14.2fl.

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: Of the four CT presets, Warm 1 is preferred. Manual tweaking delivers 6,500K
Cool: 9,100K
Standard: 8,000K
Warm 1: 6,800K
Warm 2: 5,900K



HCC VERDICT

Samsung PS51D6900
£1,000 Approx

Highs: Lovely looks; exemplary Smart TV functions; good 2D and 3D pictures; good operating system
Lows: Some crosstalk during dark 3D scenes; black levels could be deeper

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

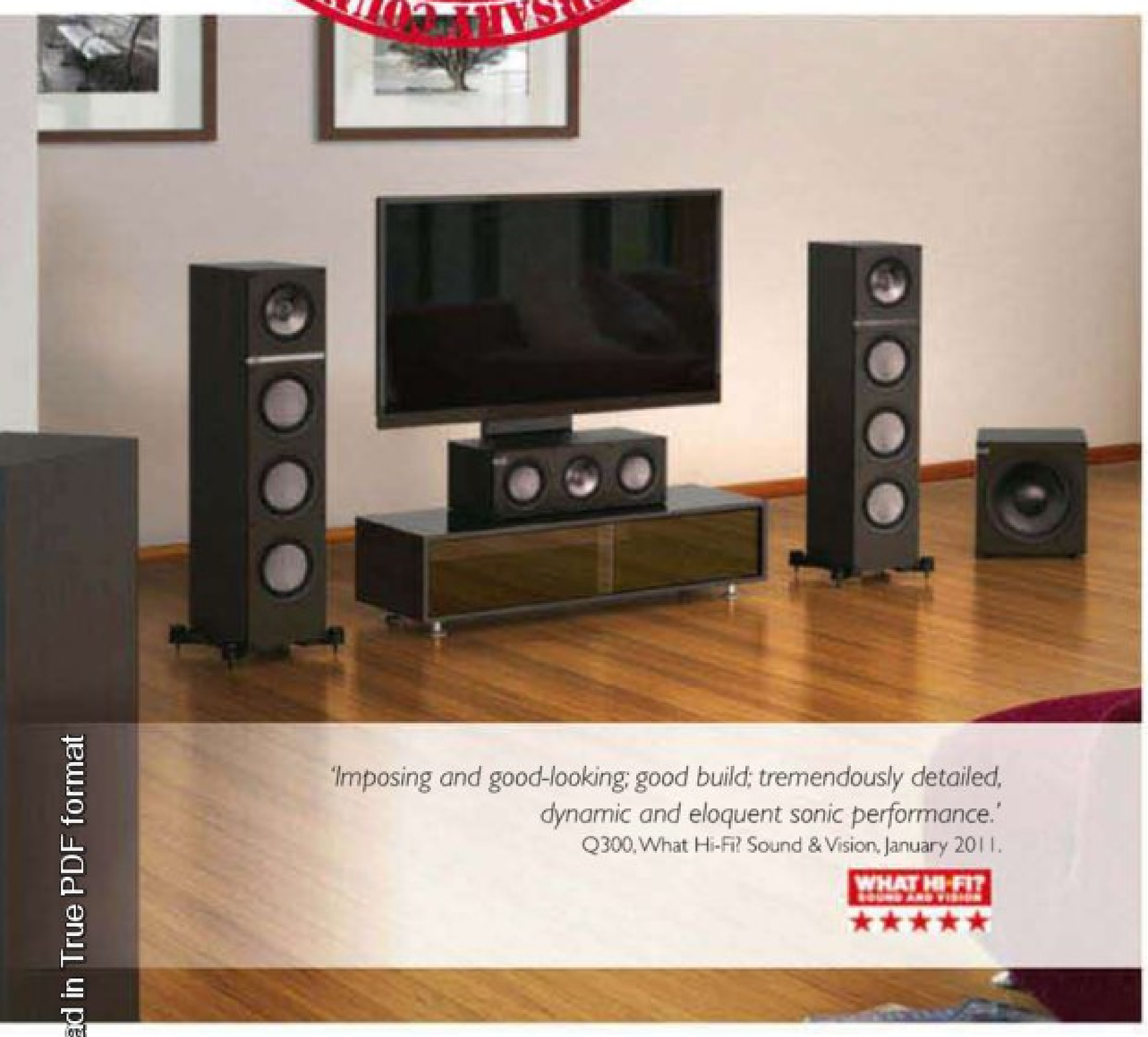
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PANASONIC TX-P42ST30B → £1,200 Approx → www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications

3D: *YES* FULL HD: yes 1080p/24
Tuner: *YES* Freeview HD,
Component video: *YES*, one
HDMI: *YES* v1.4 x 4 PC input: *NO*
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Sound: 2 x 10W Brightness (claimed): n/a
Contrast ratio (claimed): 5,000,000:1
Dimensions (w/o stand): 1020(w) x 640(h) x 69(d)mm
Weight (w/o stand): 19.5kg
Features: Ethernet connection; wi-fi ready (needs optional USB adaptor); dual USB; SD card slot; Dolby Digital Plus; Digital optical audio output; Scart socket; headphone jack; stereo phono x 2; composite video; Viera Connect including BBC iPlayer; YouTube, Skype and Acetrax; 8-day EPG



The lowest IFC setting will see off rapid camera pans in a business-like manner

Poundstretcher

Adrian Justins finds that, with a bit of patient tweaking, this no-frills, 3D-capable plasma acquits itself well



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AV/CV

Product: 42in plasma screen with Smart TV and multimedia features

Positioning: Entry-level model in a 10-strong range of 3D plasmas

Peers: Sony KDL-40EX724; LG 42PW450T; Samsung 40D8000



The P42ST30B is the most affordable Panasonic plasma yet to offer viewing in the third dimension, and in terms of both spec and looks, it is the runt of the brand's 3D plasma range. Its appearance is somewhat unrefined with its grey-green screen, industrial-looking 2in-wide gunmetal grey frame and slab of a pedestal for a stand. The plasticky remote control doesn't help matters either, but at least **the TV is solid enough to withstand knocks and sticky paws.**

The connections roster is well up to snuff, though, with just about every analogue connection you could want, plus a digital optical output and four HDMIs (one side-facing).

Multimedia duties are handled by two HDD/Flash memory compatible USB sockets and an SD card slot. Extra mural entertainment is also provided by means of VieraConnect.

In keeping with its budget status the P42ST30B's picture adjustments are on the basic side. But it does offer some higher-end features such as 600Hz sub-field drive IFC (Intelligent Field Creation) CATS (Contrast Automatic Tracking System) and P-NR (picture noise reduction).

Panasonic just won't change its entirely clunky GuidePlus-powered Freeview EPG. We've given it short shrift for several years, but our complaints fall on deaf ears.

Nor will the brand win any prizes for the dated look of its onscreen menus or the inaccessible placing of the IFC off/mid/max button and Clear Cinema on/off controls.

The P42ST30B is capable of serving up some superbly detailed HD images, but it's one of those screens that requires work to get the most out of it. *Human Planet* on BBC HD Freeview shows that colour fidelity is accurate, contrast levels and shadow detail are strong and problems such as banding and colour flashes are negligible.

Bored To Death (Sky Atlantic HD) features some rapid camera pans that are eradicated by engaging IFC's lowest setting without introducing detrimental artefacts in the process.

The Blu-ray of *No Country For Old Men* provides a great test for IFC and it's good to find that this panel shows significant improvements over previous generations. With 24p Smooth Film set to Off, there's slight judder and no image artefacts, set it to mid or max and there's no judder with just a very slight halo trail.

Turn it down

Panel noise is clearly an issue, but it's more or less solvable. The noise of the vast skies in *No Country For Old Men* can be reduced by engaging P-NR at the cost of some minor softening. But ditch PNR if you want to extract maximum clarity.

You'll need to source your own 3D specs, and at around £100 a go, they aren't cheap, but at least the brand's designs are now more comfortable.

The other bit of good news is that the screen is a strong 3D performer. With the *Monsters vs Aliens 3D* Blu-ray disc, the scenes with strong vertical objects such as the Golden Gate Bridge show very little crosstalk so that you aren't aware of any image lag. In terms of perspective and depth you can't really go wrong with CGI for 3D, but Sky's 3D channel suffers through resolution loss.

Aesthetic failings aside, the P42ST30B can reward you with an impressive viewing experience – but with similar-sized 3D models from LG and Samsung coming in a few hundred pounds cheaper, it might struggle to find buyers.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: An improvement on last year's models in terms of power consumption



Test footage: Power consumption drifts quite a lot – we measured an average 110W with movie footage

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Contrast in Cinema mode measured at 56,000:1 with a luminance of 16.3fL

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: There are plenty of presets/settings – we rate the Cinema mode under the Normal preset as the closest to 6,500K
Cool: 9,500K
Normal: 6,800K
Warm: 5,900K
Cinema (Normal): 6,600

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P42ST30B
£1,200

Highs: Solid picture performance; lack of artefacts with IFC; Viera Connect portal

Lows: Drab styling; Freeview EPG issues; 3D specs not supplied

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Design: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StereoKaga.com

Audio-licious HD

With its lofty price tag, Denon's DBP-2012UD will have to do a lot to lure **Danny Philips** away from the budget end of the Blu-ray market – and YouTube access isn't what he had in mind



The DBP-2012UD features solid build quality, subtle curving and a clean fascia

Stereokeys.com

The DBP-2012UD is built like Vin Diesel and boasts high-grade internal electronics that aim to deliver superior performance to the masses. The £750 price tag is as hefty as the player itself, but will be viewed as peace of mind for any AV enthusiast looking for a machine to satisfy their videophile aspirations.

Apart from the headline 3D capability, this is also a universal player, which means it spins Super Audio CD and DVD-Audio, too.

AV/CV

Product: 3D-ready Blu-ray player

Positioning: Denon's premium 3D BD deck

Peers: OPPO BDP-93EU; Marantz UD7006

A USB port and DLNA 1.5 support also boost the deck's multimedia cred.

The machine shares the same structural DNA as Denon's reference-class DBP-4010UD, which has Direct Mechanical Ground Construction to suppress vibration. Plus the luxurious build extends to the chunky buttons on the fascia and the smoothly gliding disc-tray mechanism.

Around the back, it's disappointing to find a single HDMI v1.4 port, which means owners of the DBP-2012UD with older AVRs will need to employ the 7.1 analogue outputs to enjoy HD audio and 3D pictures simultaneously. Elsewhere on that back panel you'll find a separate set of analogue stereo outputs for pure audio playback, component and composite video ports and a coaxial digital audio output. The deck will also slot beautifully into a custom install setup with RS232 and remote control input/output.



Stable net link

An Ethernet port is your only gateway to you home network, as there's no built-in wi-fi or facility for adding it via a USB dongle. For £750, you might expect that option.

Once plumbed in, though, I had no trouble streaming any of the supported formats during my test. You can also play them from external devices via the front USB port, or from discs. There's no MKV support, though.

Onscreen presentation is simple but effective. The Home menu sports just four icons – Media Player, YouTube (greyed out on my sample, as it is a firmware update), Setup and Quit. Choose Setup and you're greeted by a pleasant GUI with a bright colour palette and a straightforward structure. The cursor responds quickly to any command, making for a hassle-free user experience. The remote is co-operative too – each button is emblazoned with its function in shouty capital letters and logical

→ Specifications

3D: *YES*
Upscaling: *YES* to 1080p with Anchor Bay chip
Multiregion: *NO* Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: *YES* 1 x v1.4
Component: *YES*
Multichannel analogue: *YES* 7.1 phono
Digital audio: *YES* 1 x coaxial
SACD/DVD-A: *YES/YES*
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD decoding: *YES/YES*
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD bitstream: *YES/YES*
Profile 2.0: *YES* with 1GB internal memory
Dimensions: 434(w) x 107(h) x 319(d)mm
Weight: 5.2kg
Features: USB port; DLNA 1.5; DivX HD, MP3, WMA, AAC, WAV, JPEG, MPEG-1/2/4, WMV9 playback from network or USB; AVCHD playback from DVD; YouTube access (firmware update); Anchor Bay ABT2015 chip; video equaliser; Deep Colour; x.v.Colour; 192kHz/32-bit audio DACs; MLP decoding; Pure Direct mode; Bass management; RS-232



High breeding: Anti vibration tech inside has been inherited from Denon's reference-grade model

placement of the frequently-used menu and playback controls lets you navigate intuitively.

The set-up menu covers most bases, including straightforward network setup, rudimentary bass management settings for the multichannel analogue outs, HDMI settings (colour space/Deep Colour) and a couple of basic 3D options, although for the heavyweight picture adjustments you need to enter a separate menu.

This is where the DBP-2012UD shows its true videophile colours, boasting a list of tweaks that stretches far beyond your average budget player. You can adjust the contrast, brightness, gamma, sharpness and hue, as well as individual white, black and setup levels and 3D, block and mosquito noise reduction. Your settings can be stored in five memory presets, which will be useful if you want to calibrate it for different viewing conditions.

Loading times are in line with most other players on the market – our Tech Labs found it took 43 seconds to load its test disc after hitting the Close button. However, the DBP-2012 does take a while to wake up.

Maestro at work

Picture performance is excellent. The Denon relishes the challenges posed by *Inception*, expertly eking out the detail in the movie's global scenery as well as making those jaw-dropping CG shots of folding buildings and exploding shop fronts look staggeringly sharp.

There's also depth and definition to the Denon's pictures that any self-respecting movie fan will revel in. Blacks are as solid as they come, colours are richly saturated, yet realistic, while edges are clean as a whistle. Add to this a subtlety of touch that allows delicate shading, textures and shadow detail to remain visible. These qualities also help produce dazzling 3D images, which are smooth and sharp without any major blurring or crosstalk issues. It's a slight shame, however, that you can't tweak the depth of the image like the latest Panasonic and Samsung decks.

Play about with the picture settings and you can easily fine tune the picture to work in harmony with your display and room conditions.

Where you will notice an improvement over the more affordable mass market machines is in audio quality. Rigged up to my sound system using the isolated analogue stereo outputs and with the Pure Direct mode engaged, **the DBP-2012UD delivers silky music playback with beautifully crisp high frequencies, robust bottom end and a tight midrange**. Everything from U2's chugging stadium rock anthems to intimate jazz pieces is handled with the sort of care and attention more closely associated with dedicated CD players – particularly when it comes to vocals.

Listen to DVD-A or SACD via the HDMI port and it's spine-tingle central, too. Roxy Music's *Avalon* and Marvin Gaye's *Let's Get It On* (both SACD) sound utterly seductive thanks to the finesse with which the Denon orchestrates the haunting surround sound info.

Fuss-free and filmic

The DBP-2012UD hits a home run on both picture and sound performance and, with its luxurious build quality, you're certainly getting a lot of player for your money. Yes, its feature list isn't in the same league as players costing much less (and the lack of wi-fi support is a pain), but the kind of people who value audio prowess and tank-like build might not be that fussed about accessing Flickr

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

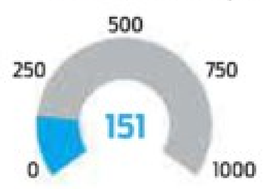


Idling: A sizable power consumption when the Denon is ticking over – but putting it in standby drops it down to under 1W



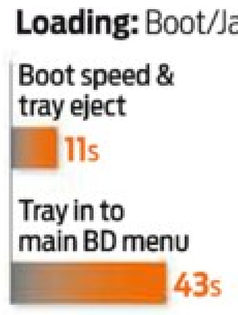
Powered: We measured no difference when the 2012UD spins a disc

Audio Jitter: ps



Sound: The DBP-2012UD's analogue audio jitter figure of 151 picoseconds is commendable

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: Quite slow to wake up from Standby



HCC VERDICT

Denon DBP-2012UD
£750 Approx

Highs: : Picture, sound and build quality; DLNA-certified
Lows: No wi-fi; single HDMI port; no support for MKV files; no provision for wi-fi

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Thumbs up for arena warriors

Tannoy has updated its Arena range with the Highline 300. **Ed Selley** is seeing quintuple

Tannoy is among the elder statesmen of the British speaker industry, and the ethos of its Prestige range of speakers has gone unchanged for half a century, taking the 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' dictum to a new extreme. More recently, the Arena series of sub/satellite packages has been Tannoy's offering in this extremely competitive category and the Highline 300 LCR is newly released and tested here.

Unlike the original Arena that is a relatively stocky set of satellites with a dedicated centre speaker, the 300 LCR system comprises five identical satellites. These each take the form of a 60cm-long, metal 'finger' with a fixed grill covering the drivers. Each LCR contains four 3in drivers and a single 0.75in tweeter. Although relatively large for a 'satellite' speaker, the LCR is not full range, with Tannoy only quoting a frequency response down to 95Hz.

Flexible positioning

The advantage of the long slim design is that a 300 LCR is equally happy placed vertically as in a left or right hand position, or horizontally as a centre speaker. This makes for a

AV/CV

Product: 5.1-channel home cinema speaker system

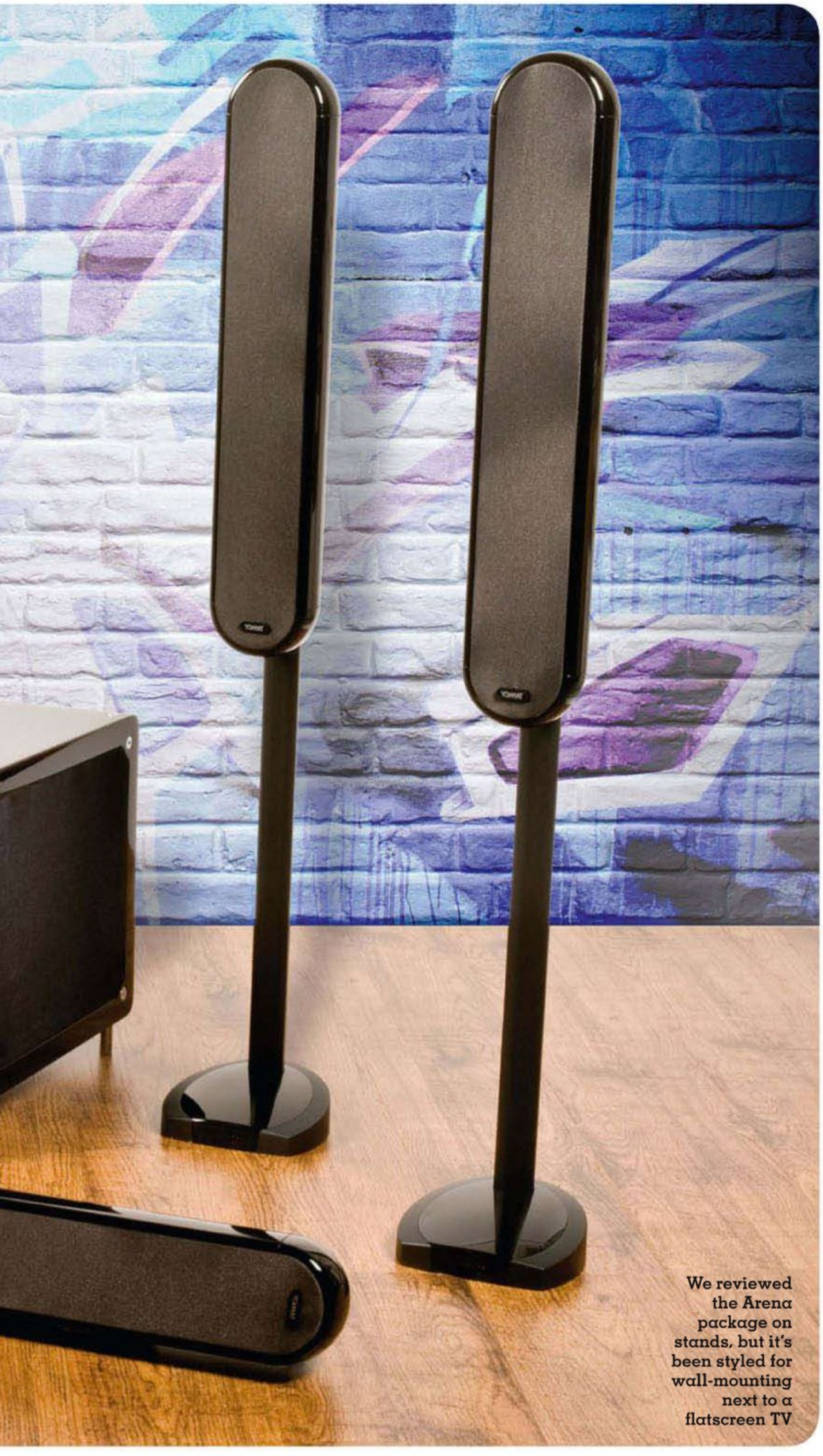
Positioning: Latest member of the Arena Highline series. Smaller of two LCR based sub/sat systems

Peers: KEF T-Series; Monitor Audio Apex

HOME CINEMA Choice ★★★★ BEST BUY

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We reviewed the Arena package on stands, but it's been styled for wall-mounting next to a flatscreen TV

visually elegant solution and a sonically effective one. With all speakers sharing exactly the same driver complement and cabinet volume, their behaviour should be identical. This means that the handover from left to right and front to back should be seamless.

Placing the 300 LCR's is a simple enough business as well. Tannoy says the design has been voiced with a view to wall mounting or at least for use close to a wall (hence their flatscreen TV-matching aesthetic). To this end, they are supplied with a wall bracket, and Tannoy has paid attention to recess the rear terminals for a flush fit (up until the point you want to use banana plugs anyway). A tabletop stand is supplied, as well as a cradle, for using a 300 LCR on its side. A floorstand is also available and the review was carried out with all save the centre mounted on these.

BASH-ful ampification

The matching Highline TS300 Subwoofer consists of a sealed enclosure with a 300W BASH amplifier powering a 10in driver. As subwoofers go, this is an attractive unit with the driver concealed behind a grill and a relatively slim profile. A very well received feature is Tannoy's decision to turn the controls into a part of the design. The front panel features all of the controls you normally contort yourself around the back of the subwoofer to operate, with handsome chrome knobs for each. Unless you are concerned that children are going to wind the volume up to maximum when you're not looking, this makes a great deal of sense to me. Mounted with the driver to one side to reduce the footprint, the only minor gripe is that the feet and stands need to be extended a considerable distance to give the required clearance to the underside of the sub where the mains and LFE input are placed.

Fit and finish is very good. The metal-bodied satellites feel solid and are braced with what Tannoy's Differential Material Technology, which is designed to reduce resonance. The result is a hefty weight of 5kg per speaker. The gloss finish is excellent and gives the satellites a look and feel commensurate with the asking price. Purists may bemoan the lack of detachable grilles but, in reality, the the Highline's typical end-user won't want naked drivers on show.

The brackets and stands are logical in terms of fitting and



Tannoy's TS300 subwoofer marries a 10in driver to a 300W amp

Woofer: mounting, although there is a daunting moment when you open the box to be confronted with something that looks like a Meccano kit. The good news is that most of the screws and fastenings stay in the box. Fitting the speakers to the stands proved sufficiently logical, although it was tricky to get a perfectly solid fit between speaker and stand. The resulting tower feels stable enough and the newer version of the stand (we've used an older model) will have a larger base, further improving stability.

Setup of is simple. The voicing effort pays off as they seem to be unconcerned with being placed right up against walls or right into a corner, which can often seriously affect other satellites. **The sub performed best towards the front of my room and didn't set off any of the resonances that can be provoked.** An averagely competent auto setup program should be able to get the Arenas working well.

The performance of the Highline system is very appealing. *The King's Speech* is given an insightful presentation, with the satellites retrieving the detail from the soundtrack extremely well, while managing to bring incidental effects out without losing the all-important dialogue. Voices are well presented and manage to sound believable. Congested passages remain easy to follow.

As the design would suggest, the handover from speaker to speaker is seamless, and coped well with the tweeters on the left and right speakers being at a significantly different level to the tweeter in the centre unit. The soundstage across the front is cohesive and superior. This is equally effective front to back.

Find the right spot

The effect isn't perfect, however; the dispersion of the satellites seems quite narrow. The Tannoys will not produce as large a soundstage as some more conventional designs of a similar price and the result is that there is a definite sweetspot for listening, more so than some other sub/sat designs. Placing the front left and right speakers wider apart with a little toe-in improved matters slightly, but didn't eliminate them entirely.

The TS300 subwoofer is also a very civilised performer. Handover between it and the satellites is good and worked best at nearer 80Hz than the 95Hz suggested by the specs. Given the more muscular mayhem of *Unstoppable*, it manages to combine suitable heft with explosions while staying free of bloat and overhang.

In an absolute sense, there are more ballistic performers, but few that also manage to look as elegant as this combination does. Both the subwoofer and the satellites retain their composure when pushed hard, and they prove sensitive enough to go pretty loud without any signs of undue strain from the amplifier.

Given the company's long pedigree in two-channel hi-fi, it isn't much of surprise to discover the Arena's are very capable with music. The excellent tonality and insight into the mix makes for a convincing performance, although once again they don't produce the most extensive soundstage.

The Arenas are a well considered speaker package that combines a very elegant design aesthetic with a level of performance that keeps more conventional designs honest. If I'm being really picky, there is always a sense that the Tannoy's are a little too civilised where other designs would let rip, and the relatively narrow sweet spot could be an annoyance, but these should not detract from the wider whole. If you want a package that can entertain without dominating the room, the Arenas deserve an audition ●

→ Specifications

300 LCR Satellite

Drive unit: 4 x 3in mid-bass, 1 x 0.75in tweeter
Enclosure: Sealed
Frequency response: 95Hz-62kHz
Sensitivity: 87dB, 2.83V@1m
Power handling: 75W
Dimensions: 590(h) x 101(w) x 101(d)mm
Weight: 5kg

TS300 Subwoofer

Drive unit: 1 x 10in
Enclosure: Side-firing, sealed
Frequency response: From 29Hz (-6dB)
Onboard power: 300W RMS, BASH amplification
Dimensions: 445(h) x 210(w) x 350(d)mm
Weight: 13kg
Connections: 1 x line-level phono LFE input



HCC VERDICT

Tannoy Arena Highline 300 system
Approx £1,850

Highs: Flexible design; smooth, detailed sound; good build quality
Lows: Not always the most exciting performer; slightly narrow sound range

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Adam Rayner *HCC #183*

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THE TOP 20



Choosing a home cinema system is a potential minefield that must be negotiated with great care or safely avoided by letting experts guide you. If you want to end up with a system that, as a minimum, meets your expectations in terms of picture and sound quality, reading magazine product reviews and choosing the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys can only ever be part of the answer at best. Looking for the cheapest price and having a system delivered to your door, even with a 'knowledgeable' friend to help set it up, is a well-trodden path to disappointment.

There is a bewildering choice of components on the market today and also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D? Full 1080p capability is now the only sensible choice but the appropriate source components, such as a Blu-ray player, need to be part of the equation. The sound performance of a system is also hugely important, even more so if you will be listening to music, or music DVD's, through the same system. If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Having an amp with the right inputs for the best connectivity is essential but you will also need to decide on a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub and, crucially, where they will be sited for the best results. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

WHAT AND WHERE TO BUY

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ...**don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

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GUIDE
TO BUYING HOME CINEMA

LISTED BELOW ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY.
They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

BUYING OR BEING SOLD TO?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a carefully selected group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a far better way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

SOUTH

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245
www.rayleighhifi.com

Colchester RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682
www.rayleighhifi.com

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY
9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE
36 Queen Street. 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
44a High Street. 01268 779762
Custom Install Dept.
01268 776932
www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road. 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA
69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007
www.kenthomecinema.co.uk

LONDON

Ealing AUDIO VENUE
27 Bond Street. 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS
61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE
163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200
www.frankharvey.co.uk

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS
93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254
www.musicmatters.co.uk

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227
www.acoustica.co.uk

York SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108
www.soundorg.co.uk

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen HOLBURN HI-FI
441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729
www.holburnhifi.co.uk

Glasgow GLASGOW AUDIO
135 Great Western Road.
0141 332 2200/4707
www.glasgowaudio.com

CEDIA® BADA

The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

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SERVICE	★★★★★
FACILITIES	★★★★★
VERDICT	★★★★★

TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST HOME ENTERTAINMENT DEALERS

QUALITY ASSURED ★★★★★

Stereokage.com

Stereokaos.com

Darkchip diva

Can £800 really buy you a quality hi-def home cinema projector? According to bigscreen behemoth **John Archer,** indeed it can

Usually projectors that cost less than £800 are either aimed at the business/education markets or absolutely rubbish. And there can be no hiding place for shoddiness when you're watching a picture that's 100in wide or more.

With this in mind, I was wary of the InFocus SP8600. But then scepticism changed to enthusiasm when I found out it uses a DarkChip 3 (DC3) chipset. This is a generation on from the DarkChip 2 system usually found in budget DLP PJs (such as the recently reviewed BenQ W1100 – *HCC* #197), and typically delivers benefits over the DC2 in terms of colour response, noise levels and, especially, contrast.

The other key part of the SP8600's optical system is a three-speed, six-segment (RYGCMB) colour wheel, which should help single-chip DLP's rainbow effect.

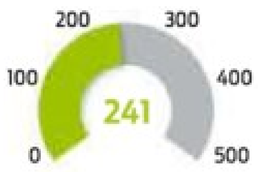
Colours, meanwhile, ought to benefit from the inclusion of UNISHAPE lamp technology – here, the lamp continually adjusts its output to match the colour segment in play on the colour wheel.

Meanwhile, the SP8600's connectivity includes a handy two HDMIs and a 12V trigger output. In short, there's really nothing on the SP8600's spec sheet that betrays its decidely cheap market position.

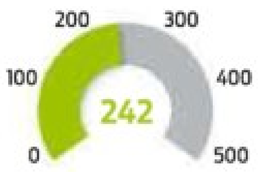
Maybe its build quality is shoddy? It's certainly not the prettiest projector around, with some rather plasticky, gloss-free black bodywork.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: Power consumption increases to 275W with 'Boost' lamp mode activated



Test footage: There's a minimal difference with movie footage – consumption stays the same regardless of content

Contrast: ratio



Picture: In the default 'Bright' mode, we measured contrast at 2,100:1, with luminance at 36.4fL. Post calibration, contrast reduced to 1,200:1

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: 'Normal' picture mode gave the most accurate colour temperature
Normal: 6,700K
Cool: 7,400K
Cooler: 8,100K
High Cool: 8,500K
Lamp Native: 6,700K
Warm: 5,100K

The SP8600's DarkChip 3 chipset is normally found on more costly models

HOME CINEMA Choice ★★★★ BEST BUY

AV/CV

Product: An entry-level DLP projector with installation-friendly features and a DarkChip 3 engine.

Positioning: One of only two models. This is the cheapest in the UK

Peers: BenQ W1100; Vivitek H1085

But it's small enough to store a cupboard when not in use, and it's got sufficient curves not to look ugly when sat on a coffee table.

The SP8600 backs up its usefulness in relatively 'rough and ready' environments by carrying a built-in speaker system, leaving an 1800 Lumens brightness output figure as the only thing concerning me on its spec sheet. A figure this high can be a good thing with a 'normal', more expensive projector. But the concern with a model as cheap as the SP8600 is that its brightness will overwhelm its contrast, leading to poor black levels.

Setting up the machine reveals that it doesn't have any vertical optical image shift. This is entirely normal at the SP8600's price point, but I mention it because it means many people will have to use keystone correction to straighten the sides of their picture – a process which effectively results in distorting the source image a little.

Optical zoom is limited, too, at just 1.2x, but the SP8600 does provide plenty of fine tuning options, including gamma controls and colour management.

As hoped, **the DC3 chipset helps the SP8600 perform ridiculously well for its money**. Detail reproduction from the stellar Blu-ray of the Coen brothers' *True Grit* is superb, with, for instance, the textures in background wallpapers and every strand of the film's unfeasible amounts of facial hair being excellently rendered.

The image's contrast is exceptional for a projector at this price point, too. The high brightness rating pushes whites and bright colours, as expected but, contrary to my fears, it doesn't stop black levels during dark scenes from looking reasonably believable and natural. There are plenty of £1,000-plus projectors that don't deliver dark scenes such as *True Grit*'s nighttime shack shoot-out as convincingly as does the SP8600.

Motion is handled well, with no severe motion blur or judder issues, and rainbow noise is only noticeable when very bright objects appear against very dark backgrounds. Which is to say, not very often. For the most part, other types of noise, such as dot crawl and grain, are decently suppressed.

The only bizarre exception appeared during one of my favourite test scenes, the main card game in *Casino Royale* (the Daniel Craig version). During this sequence, the heavily filtered skin tones broke down into quite excessive blocking noise – a phenomenon I couldn't repeat with any other disc. And I tried a lot of 'em. There must be something about that *Casino Royale* colour tone specifically that upsets the SP8600.

Thankfully for fans of the Bond movie, InFocus has developed a firmware fix you can download and apply to the projector yourself that can kick the noise into touch.

Aside from the minor rainbowing and fixable noise issue, the only complaint I can level at the SP8600's pictures is that dark scenes look slightly hollow, thanks to a shortage of shadow detail.

Cue a reminder of the SP8600's sub-£800 price – I expect issues like that at this price point. But I don't expect a performance so rewarding. The InFocus is therefore a home cinema bargain of quite ridiculous proportions. Get in!



→ Specifications

3D: *NO*
Full HD: *YES* 1080p24
Component video: *YES* 1 HDMI: *YES* 2 x v1.3
PC input: *YES* 1 x D-Sub 12V trigger: *YES* 1
Resolution: 1920 x 1080 Brightness (claimed): 1800 Lumens
Contrast ratio (claimed): 5,000:1
Dimensions: 326(w) x104(h) x 254(d)mm
Weight: 3.5kg
Features: Primary and secondary colour management; x1.2 optical zoom; high/low lamp modes; noise reduction; gamma settings; colour temp/flesh tone adjustment; 30dB fan noise; 2,500-hour lamp life



HCC VERDICT

InFocus SP8600, £800 Approx

Highs: Good value and general picture quality; flexible picture settings; long warranty

Lows: Minor rainbowing; dark scenes can lack shadow detail

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**

Design: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Stereo.gif

Comedy standup delivers gravitas

Adam Rayner tests the most established brand we have never seen before in the UK

Branding is funny stuff. We expect some gravitas with excellent products – being too flippant about something of high-quality tends to put us Brits right off. There's been a huge fuss about chavs wearing Burberry and 'devaluing' the brand, for instance.

Not so the Germans. These speakers are made in Germany by in-car brand, Magnat, which has never seen fit to change its cartoony logo font. Even on its £25K-a-pair flagship home cinema speaker. Yet don't be put off by that comedy typeface; Magnat knows its onions, and the brand's home cinema stable has long since gone off on its own development curve, offering some tremendous technology for the price.

Reviewed here is the Quantum 650 series – big brothers to Magnat's Quantum 550 and 600s, yet junior to the top-end Quantum 1000 set. They're distributed in the UK by BGAudio Ltd, which can be reached on 01923 853211.

Classic lineup

The tested speaker array is simple and classical in design. The Quantum 657 front towers are dual-ported to the back, with big open-mouthed curvy ports which Magnat calls Airflex™. One of the bigger drivers is coupled up to the tweeter as a mid-bass driver, while the other two drivers of the same size are used for bass. You get a bi-wire/biamp set of posts to the rear – and if you do divide up the speaker with two wires, removing the supplied jumpers, a passive crossover inside will sort out the '*hoch*' from the '*mitt*'.

The 653 bookshelves, used as rears, have just the equivalent of the upper section of the 657s – the mid- and high- driver – and the 63 centre uses a brace of midbasses in a smaller 5.25in size straddling the same tweeter used all round.

The latter is a sexy piece of kit for such a low-price set of speakers. It has Ferrofluid in its voice coil gap and uses a fabric dome. Soft fabric domes generally sound nicer than harder ones (unless they are costly >



Provided it's not pushed too hard, this system savours the detail of movies and music

AV/CV

Product: Lower mid-range floorstanding 5.1 system

Positioning: Below only the Quantum 1000 models in the brand's home entertainment range

Peers: Jamo D500; Acoustic Energy Aelite 3; Monitor Audio Radius R270HD10

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Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



Little devils: The tweeters benefit from being housed in stubby horns

examples, or made of Diamond – which is the same thing, I suppose), while the magnetic 'liquid-Iron' stays solidly in the gap in the magnet, serving to rapidly conduct heat away from the coil. It won't squeeze up and heat up like air does, compressing in the gap. **All this technical cleverness adds up to a tweeter that can go louder for longer, be less stressed and better-sounding with low power compression.**

This is normal on more expensive speakers, but not what you necessarily expect to see at this level.

The 625A subwoofer stands on feet above its own plinth. This is good as it means the maker understands bass and hasn't just boxed up a driver with an off-the-shelf amp plate from a factory. Magnat has fired the driver down onto a solid wooden platform, so it has to squeeze out of the surrounding gap at the bottom. Done right, this is like compressing explosives for better results, and makes the two gas-flowed rear ports really breathe some lows out.

Alien resurrection

After finally downloading my Father's Day gift, sci-fi comedy *Paul*, to my iPod (I adore the Triple-Play disc concept, but wish Apple would speed up...), it was time to run the traditional Blu-ray platter through these floorstanders.

Setting the subwoofer is dead easy. You just get a 50Hz-150Hz sweepable crossover knob, a gain knob and a regular 0-180° phase flipper switch. This is always worth a go. If one way sounds better, then it's correct in that phase, in that spot, in your room. It's really that simple. Connections are a high-level stereo speaker input set of binding posts and a single LFE phono input.

The eponymous star of the film is an alien who crashed in Roswell in New Mexico in 1947 and has been trying to escape ever since. The movie opens in '47, when we learn how the character got his name while experiencing the UFO crash. And sadly, we find the limit of this 5.1 system immediately. The subwoofer.

While the Magnat 625A Quantum has 275W of power, it's not enough for a crashing spaceship when the rest of this array is winging it in over your head. Despite there being some hint of a limiting circuit in the multi-language manual, the sub simply ran out of grunt and farted.

I turned it down significantly and to be fair, as my son carried on watching the rest of the movie (which I actually went to the flicks to see, despite the cheap projectors) the house was gently rumbling along. But for this system, I would want a brace of these woofers in my room.

These speakers are deeply articulate and are very good at sensible levels. With a sweet textured detail to the upper mids and highs, the clever tweeters also get some acoustic benefit from living in little stubby horns. Unfortunately, the sound can become a bit hard and brittle if you drive them over-enthusiastically,but again, for the sub-£2K price tag, you can't expect perfect detail and limitless power.

So, the Magnats' scale and might departments are lacking compared to a big system that has a driver with a high surface area. But at all other times, you will get a really well-placed soundstage, with horribly difficult instruments to reproduce, such as closely mic-ed plucked guitars and pianos, all sounding delicious, sweet and accurate.

This deft touch is well shown off as the two geeks (Simon Pegg and Nick Frost) meet Paul for the first time. He looms out of the darkness slowly and we hear his voice, quietly spoken, before we see him. You can almost hear the space around them in the Nevada desert night.

Overall, these are a really serious proposition if fidelity matters most and they fit your budget. The array sounds great with music, too, and the sub's shortcomings are less apparent on films without explosions. Which, I've been told, do exist...

→ Specifications

Magnat Quantum 657 towers

Drive Units: 2 x 6.5in ceramic-aluminium cone midbass; 1 x 6.5in ceramic-aluminium coned driver as midrange; 1 x 1.2in cloth dome tweeter with Ferrofluid cooling and damping
Enclosure: 3-way, dual rear-ported
Frequency Response: 20Hz-50kHz
Sensitivity: 93dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 200-350W
Dimensions: 202(w) x 1080(h) x 316(d)mm
Weight: 18.5Kg

Magnat Quantum Centre 63

Drive Units: 2 x 5.25in ceramic-aluminium cone midbass drivers; 1 x 1.2in cloth dome tweeter with Ferrofluid cooling and damping
Enclosure: 2-way rear-ported
Frequency Response: 32Hz-50kHz
Sensitivity: 91dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 100-180W
Dimensions: 490(w) x 175(h) x 280(d)mm
Weight: 9.5Kg

Magnat Quantum 653 surrounds

Drive Units: 1 x 6.5in ceramic-aluminium cone midbass; 1 x 1.2in cloth dome tweeter with Ferrofluid cooling and damping
Enclosure: 2-way rear-ported
Frequency Response: 30Hz-50kHz
Sensitivity: 91dB (2.83V @ 1m)
Power Handling: 100-180W
Dimensions: 202(w) x 350(h) x 280(d)mm
Weight: 6.5Kg

Magnat Quantum 625A subwoofer

Drive Unit: One 10in long-throw woofer
Enclosure: Down-firing onto its own plinth, rear vented via dual ports
Frequency Response: 19Hz-300Hz
On board power: 270W
Dimensions: 360(w) x 535(h) x 420(d)mm
Weight: 19.5Kg
Connections: Phono mono LFE input, and speaker level input via binding posts



HCC VERDICT

Magnat Quantum 650 Series
Approx £1,700

Highs: Delicious clarity and articulacy at sensible levels; value for money; sturdy cabinets
Lows: Low-frequency performance is lacking; uninspired design

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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www.teufelaudio.co.uk

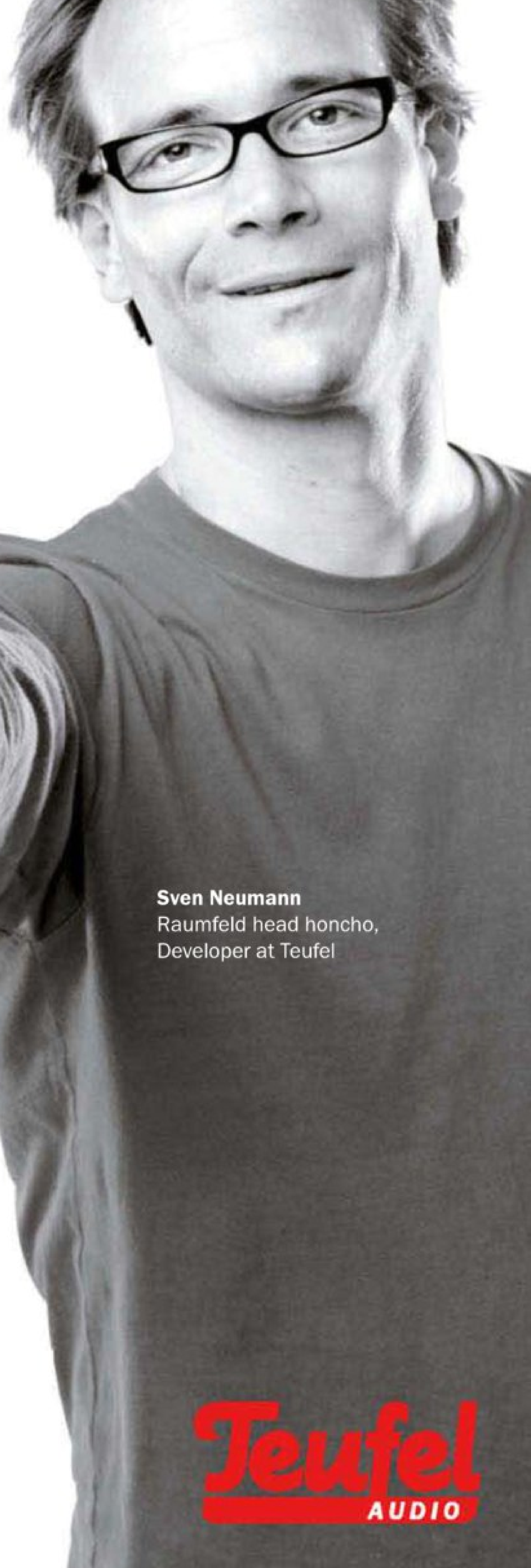
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Sven Neumann
Raumfeld head honcho,
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Teufel AUDIO

StereoKage.com

→ Specifications

Full HD: *YES* 1080p/24 3D: *YES* and 2D-3D conversion
Tuner: *YES*, Freeview HD Component: *YES*
HDMI: *YES* 4 x v1.4 Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Sound: 30w (2 x 15W) Brightness (claimed): N/A
Dynamic Contrast ratio: 'Mega'
Dimensions: 933(w) x 549(h) x 30(d) mm
Weight: 10.7kg
Features: Edge LED backlight; Ultra Clear Panel; Motion Plus; USB media playback; integrated wi-fi; Smart Hub portal featuring BBC iPlayer, YouTube, LOVEFiLM, Explore 3D and more; Ethernet connection; built-in web browser

The design of the UE40D650 is almost as striking as Samsung's Series 8 flagship

HOME CINEMA Choice ★★★★ BEST BUY

StereoKaga.com

Even smarter 3D

With advanced 'net connectivity, 3D and designer looks, this Samsung LED is a formidable bargain. **Steve May** reports





Samsung's 40UED6530 LED puts forward such a convincing case to be crowned Britain's Best Value 3D LED TV, there really doesn't seem much point considering anything else.

It sells for a mere £1,100 (or less) yet delivers a top notch Freeview HD picture, is 3D ready (obviously), can record onto an external USB hard drive, has integrated wi-fi and offers access to the brand's rapidly evolving Smart Hub apps and IPTV portal.

Of course, there are some caveats that are worth knowing before you buy, so keep reading.

Pretty as a picture

Some might say it's even prettier than the brand's Series 7 and 8 models. The transparent, super-thin bezel and crystal neck are elegant in the extreme.

This screen does a sensational job with high quality 2D feeds from Blu-ray and HD TV channels.

There's no overt luminance noise, nor 'soft drink fizz' in its pictures, just glorious, velvety clarity. **The set's black level is deep, while shadow detail is acute enough to reveal a black kitten in a coal scuttle.**

With Motion Plus turned off, the native motion resolution of this panel rests at about 875 lines. With it engaged, it jumps to a full 1080 lines. However, the various processing modes available can create smudgy motion artefacts around certain moving objects. Motion Plus also removes picture judder, but affects the visual texture of celluloid, making all feature films look as if they were shot on video. It's worth trying out the custom settings here. You might find the best solution is to keep turning it Off and On, depending on the programme material you're watching.

Stereoscopic performance is entertaining, but not technically outstanding. There is clear double imaging in some 3D sequences, most noticeable on high contrast outlines. The set offers adjustment tweaks for 3D Perspective and 3D Optimisation, but these merely move the problem to and from the screen plane. On the plus side, its 3D images are bright despite Active Shutter eyeware, while colour vibrancy is undimmed.

Samsung has a great portal playground. Its Smart Hub offers a torrent of VoD from YouTube, LOVEFiLM, Daily Motion, BBC iPlayer and Acetrax. You'll also find the brand's exclusive Explore 3D service, which disgorges free 3D movies and trailers with reckless abandon. The quality of this side-by-side streaming 3D is surprisingly good.

However, Smart Hub's social media component is a little awkward. To log into Facebook or Twitter you need to set up a separate access account with Samsung itself.

This is a bit of a drag. Several days after creating my account, I forgot the password. When prompted, the TV offered to send me a temporary one, but this failed to arrive and I never bothered to log on again.

More positively, the screen offers a great built-in browser that supports Flash and also maintains a live TV window, so you can watch and surf at the same time.

There's wide ranging media streaming for music and video files. The most comprehensive media support comes via local USB, so if you have MKVs you'll need to manually transport your files to the TV on a thumb drive.

Overall, the 40UED6530 is a ridiculously tasty screen for the money. Its image quality alone makes it a dish worth ordering

AV/CV

Product: Entry level 'designer' 3D LED with Smart net-connected functions

Positioning: Below Samsung's Series 7 & 8 3D screens

Peers: Sony KDL-40EX723; Panasonic TX-L37DT30

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: With our standard 100IRE full white display, power consumption is less than you would expect for a set of this size



Test footage: Typical movie footage, the 40UED6530 averages only 46W – excellent power measurement

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Once calibrated, we measured contrast at 117,000:1 with a luminance of 34.3fL. In Dynamic mode, contrast jumps to 401,000:1

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: Off the four CT presets, Warm 2 is closest to 6,500K – manual RGB tuning is possible
Cool: 12,100K
Standard: 8,700K
Warm 1: 7,300K
Warm 2: 6,300K

HCC VERDICT

Samsung UE40D6530
£1,100 Approx

Highs: Sharp HD image quality; content-rich Smart Hub portal; integrated wi-fi
Lows: No 3D glasses; mild 3D crosstalk; social media is a faff

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Slimline simplicity

Panasonic's slimline 3D Blu-ray system majors on picture and sound quality – but can't meet the multimedia needs of **Adrian Justins**

AV/CV

Product:
5.1 3D Blu-ray home cinema system

Positioning:
The flagship product in a range of four 3D-capable systems

Peers:
Samsung HT-D5530; Sony BDV-E870; LG HX976TZW

Each tallboy speaker houses a pair of midbass drivers and a tweeter

Stereokaos.com

Panasonic's SC-BTT775 is a multi-talented home cinema beast, offering 3D Blu-ray playback, HDMI switching, a smattering of Smart TV services and a complete 5.1 surround sound system with the option to add extra wireless surround back speakers.

Like the subwoofer, the cylindrical tallboy speakers feel solid enough, but attaching them to their stands is a bit of a faff. Nor is the end result that appealing – they have a tendency to wobble.

While the system is no catwalk queen, at least the menu has a contemporary look with icons that pulse when selected. Colour-coded speaker plugs make set up simple.

CGI movies often have the most inventive soundtracks and provide ideal workouts for surround sound systems, and the *Monsters Vs Aliens* 3D Blu-ray has several scenes that prove how adept the SC-BTT775 is in the audio department. At the start of the scene where Susan is chased through downtown San Francisco, a piece of paper blows across the screen from front right to rear left, breaking the silence. It's a visual 3D trick, but its movement is enhanced by the journey of the fluttering sounds across the soundscape. Then, as you hear the thumping strides of a giant robot, the room starts to vibrate as the sub/sat combo gradually wells up. But everything is nicely controlled, as Susan's breath can still be clearly heard through the centre channel.

Furthermore, the clunk of a lamp post hitting the ground is bombastic enough to startle you, and the cooing of pigeons can clearly be heard from the rears. However, as Susan approaches Golden Gate Bridge and the orchestration of the music starts to dominate, it becomes less clear where sounds are coming from and the system feels a little overwhelmed. I opted to turn it down.

Fantastic Four's DTS-HD Master soundtrack lacks the sonic craft of *Monsters Vs Aliens*, but still comes through with gusto. Dialogue such as Ben's self-pitying muttering on the Brooklyn Bridge is pin-sharp, but at higher volume the centre channel starts to sound a tad harsh. And as the crash scene unfolds, you realise how the system's beanpole speakers don't quite have the welly to cope with cacophonous sounds. The sub fares better – with *Avatar*'s DTS-HD Master soundtrack the opening shot of the space ship is given tremendous impact by the thunderous rumble of its engines.

One of the BTT775's many claimed talents is Cinema Surround Plus, which aims to deliver a 22-channel effect via a lot of virtual height and width tomfoolery. The results are noticeable, with certain material, but whether it really adds to the audio experience is debatable. AV purists will choose to avoid it.

Classy visuals

All of these discs are complemented by superb visuals. The BTT775's player matches standalone decks in serving up some first-class images, with outstanding clarity, colour fidelity and contrast. Even the built-in upscaler makes a decent fist of turning standard-def DVDs into highly watchable pseudo-HD ones, although what classics such as *The Long Good Friday* gain in resolution they lose in some softness.

In general, 3D playback is excellent but 2D to 3D conversion is only partially successful. Early on in *Avatar* when Sully emerges from his long sleep, the hangar stretches far into the distance and can look amazing on a good 3D deck. Here, when converted from 2D it does look convincing, but can't match the real deal for impact. Similarly, the floating insects in the Na'vi jungle don't ping out like they should. That said, it's a better 3D experience than Sky's 3D broadcast.

When watching 3D you can play with the depth setting and impose a vignette of varying thickness and colour. This softens the edges and reduces eye strain, but can distract from the picture itself, particularly if you select red, blue or grey for the border. Moreover, it doesn't work with letterbox movies.

The BTT775's multimedia potential is a bit underwhelming. Unlike Panasonic's new TVs which feature the improved VieraConnect service, this all-in-one system carries the first-gen VieraCast service. This includes YouTube, Twitter, Skype and Acetrax, but sorely lacks iPlayer. And, despite DLNA capability, I was unable to get the BTT775 to talk with my Windows 7 laptop, nor would its iPod player recognise my iPod Touch, which is listed as being compatible.

Overall, the SC-BTT775 is a decent starter system for the fledgling home cinema fan. It does well visually and is no slouch sonically – but the build quality and vintage online portal disappoint

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

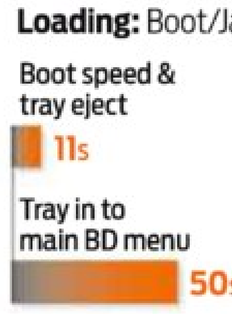


Idling: You might want to put the system into standby



Playing: We measured real world, average consumption at 95W

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: Booting takes longer than a standalone player

→ Specifications

3D playback: *YES* and 2D-3D
Video upscaling: *YES* up to 1080p
Multiregion: *NO* Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: *YES* 2 x v1.3 in, 1 x v1.4 out
Component video: *NO*
Multichannel phono audio: *NO*
Digital audio: *NO* optical in x 1
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD decode: *YES*
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD bitstream: *YES*
Profile 2.0: *YES* requires additional storage to do BD Live
Total Amplification (Claimed): 1,000W
Dimension (main unit): 430(w) x 40(h) x 279d)mm
Weight (main unit): 3kg
Features: FM radio; DLNA; Ethernet; Viera Connect online portal; DivX, DivX HD, MKV, JPEG, MP3, MPO, AVCHD playback; SD Card; USB; Skype camera input; RF aerial socket; stereo phono out; composite video out (for iPod use); wi-fi rear speakers transmitter socket; iPod dock; 200W subwoofer; bamboo speakers (2 x dome woofer, 1 x semi-dome tweeter per speaker); Flat, Heavy, Clear, Soft equalizer modes; plays BD-R, BD-RE, BD-Video, DVD-Video, DVD-R/-RW/-R DL, DVD+R/+RW/+R DL, CD, CD-R/RW

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic SC-BTT775
£400 Approx

Highs: Articulate sound; easy to use; excellent image quality; fast disc loading
Lows: : Struggles at high volume; multimedia inconsistencies; plasticky design

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

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Stereokage.com

Love thy neighbour...

It's not a tiger's scratching post – it's a sub. **Adam Rayner** gets tubular

AV/CV

Product: 12.5in high-performance subwoofer

Positioning: Middle of the PC range; SVS also makes other more traditionally shaped subs

Peers: Sunfire HRS 12; REL G1; Monitor Audio GXW15



Round sound: Connections and controls are located on the back (right) of the PC-12 Plus



Coming up with a natty little subwoofer that can look like a radiator just isn't SVS' style. Neither is designing a tiny box with a bonkers amplifier to make it all but explode with power.

No, SVS has got attitude. It sticks it to the boutique brands, giving you a madness-inducing slice of performance and grunt for a price far less than that offered by the big shiny boys.

The SVS PC-12 Plus DSP is unbelievably unsubtle. It's a sodding great carpeted bass tube, like the bastard offspring of a home cinema system and a 1980s boom car.

Control freak

This offering is a fifth-generation mutation and is actually less massive than the PC-13 Ultra that blew me away once before. It now arrives with a knob-and-screen adjustment system on the back. Controls include gain, low pass filter (slope and frequency in seven steps from 125Hz to 31Hz), phase by 15° steps, 'room gain comp' (on/off), a feature called Subwoofer Tune and a single band parametric equaliser. This amounts to a couple of curves you can add on and a room cut if you need it. I turned the subwoofer down to deepest bass at 16Hz.

I tuned it by ear, knowing that my room has a 70Hz peak and the bass was vast. Tight, sexy, rich and unflappable on music, it tracked with melodious intent and was effortless in headroom.

With *Paul* on Blu-Ray, the UFO crash had huge, absurd monster deflection and the sheer amount of air moved is way beyond impressive. That moving, ported air has a 'stretchiness', so it wasn't completely tight, but you can seal those ports one by one for fine-tuning.

Yes, some people will think this subwoofer is far too ugly, but users can always lie it on its side and hide it behind the sofa.

Your neighbours will know you have it, though. Even if you live in a detached house

→ Specifications

SV Sound PC-12 Plus DSP

Drive Unit: 1 x 12.5in downward-firing pulp and fibreglass cone
Enclosure: Vertical cylinder, plinth-loaded and ported via three 3in flared ports (foam bungs supplied, to offer four tunings)
Frequency Response: 10Hz-150Hz
On-Board Power: 800W RMS from Sledge™ amplifier
Dimensions: 1,022(h) x 407(diameter)mm
Weight: 38.5Kg
Connections: Stereo LFE line in and line out on paired phono sockets, plus balanced XLR inputs and outputs on paired connections

HCC VERDICT

SV Sound PC-12 Plus DSP
£1,250 Approx

Highs: Stonking, weighty bass; easy control via a cool DSP
Lows: Function has bred form – you may want to hide it behind the sofa

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Pack some high vaultage

Martin Pipe checks out an upmarket storage tank

Networked-attached storage (NAS) is a speedy, convenient means of backing up data. Modern units, such as the ReadyNAS Ultra 4 featured here, are also capable of streaming any multimedia files stored on them to any Smart device that can accept them. The four drive bays of the heavy and massively-built ReadyNAS Ultra 4 can each accommodate 2TB drives and so a combined total of 8TB is possible – that's an awful lot of video, photos and music.

Highs

- Supports various implementations of RAID technology, which trades off available capacity against protection for your data. If one of the drives fails, you should be able to recover your files. Features like 'RAIDar' and 'X-RAID 2' help you make the most of this useful feature.
- Powered by a dual-core 1.6GHz Intel Atom processor, it's speedy and responsive. The onboard DLNA 1.5 media server worked well with a variety of networked players. Even multiple full HD video streams were glitch-free.
- Useful multimedia features include a Squeezebox server and iTunes compatibility. As far as computers are concerned, this NAS is equally at home with Windows and MacOS. And it will, of course, also work with Linux.
- Applets adding new features (such as BitTorrent) can be downloaded from the Netgear website.



NAS massive: Offers a maximum of 8TB of storage

Lows

- I couldn't get it to join my Windows workgroup, as it has a space in its name and the Ultra 4 didn't like that, forcing me to either create a separate workgroup, or rename the existing one (and change the settings of every connected device). Thankfully, Netgear confirmed the bug and fixed it with a firmware release.
- The (secure) web interface may be powerful, but every time it's accessed with Windows Internet Explorer 8 a 'certificate error' warning is displayed. But this can be ignored.
- Only 3.5in drives are supported, while 2.5in models run quieter and consume less power.

HCC VERDICT

Netgear ReadyNAS Ultra 4, £430 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

XPAND X103 UNIVERSAL 3D GLASSES → £120 Approx → www.xpand.me

Get your '3D parties' started

Martin Pipe tests 3D spex designed to work across many brands



No Bluetooth: The spex won't work with newer Samsung TVs

XpanD has now introduced 3D glasses that can be partnered with infra-red triggered 3D displays from the likes of Panasonic, Samsung, Philips and Toshiba, thereby reducing compatibility issues for 3DTV owners. If you're going to a 3D party and aren't sure what (older!) TV you'll be watching, these XpanD glasses are good bet-hedgers. XpanD will be launching a new range (the X104) with support for Bluetooth as well as the radio system favoured by Panasonic.

Highs

- These well-made glasses are fairly easy to install. A simple programming system, based around a single button and LED, enables you to tell the glasses which TV you're using.
- In its set-up mode, the brand is selected cyclically by pressing the button. The number of LED 'flashes' corresponds to a specific TV brand; if it's correct, press nothing for 30secs and you're done. Once set, your choice is remembered until you change it.
- The picture quality and comfort level are on par with the brands' own glasses in terms of light-attenuation, flicker, separation and so on.
- They wrap around existing spectacles and have replaceable nosepieces (three are supplied).
- Upgradable for new models of TV via a dealer only. Compatibility with Sony, JVC and Sharp wasn't claimed for our sample, but the website now lists these brands.

Lows

- Didn't work with a Samsung UE55D8000. All we could see was a slightly-attenuated 'double-image', because the latest Samsungs use Bluetooth technology (as opposed to infra-red) to trigger the glasses.
- They only work with LG's few active 3D TVs. Passive LGs are unsuitable.
- Like many other active-shutter glasses, the X103s are powered by a non-rechargeable CR2032 li-ion cell.

HCC VERDICT

XpanD Universal 3D Glasses £120 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

In Brief

DiRT3
Codemasters
£50 Approx



Rally driver Colin McRae might be dead, but his gaming legacy lives on in this superb series. This third outing mixes up trendy 'extreme' off-road action with plenty of traditional rallying to please the purists. Add in the superb HD graphics and you have a driving game made for home cinemas

1 2 3 4 5

Store4Egg.com

Stereo.ECE.com

BUFFALO WLAE-AG300N → £40 Approx → www.buffalo-technology.com

To Nfiniti and beyond...

Martin Pipe sorts out several different network woes with this device

Buffalo's WLAE-AG300N works in three ways. The first is to add an additional wi-fi access point if there are 'black spots' in your home. Here, an Ethernet cable is run from your router to where the additional coverage is required. In the second mode, two WLAE-AG300Ns act as a wireless 'bridge' between two existing wired networks. Finally, there's the ability to connect non wi-fi devices to a wireless network, by running an Ethernet cable from the WLAE-AG300N to the device.



Bridge builder: Brings wi-fi to hard-to-reach areas

Highs

- The new 802.11n/a 5GHz band is supported, in addition to the established 802.11a/g and 11b (2.4GHz) modes. The former band is far less congested and claims data transfer rates as high as 300Mbps.
- Two Ethernet ports ensure that a pair of networked devices can be simultaneously connected and thus converted to wireless operation.
- Very easy to use and configure supports DHCP.
- A web interface (which would be accessible to Mac and Linux users) allows you to subsequently change parameters including SSID/ network name, encryption mode (WEP, TKIP and AES are all supported, as the ability to enter your own key) and radio mode.
- Technology known as AOSS (AirStation One-Touch Secure System) will speed up the setup of secure wireless connections. We had no problems with performance, either. Streamed audio and video alike were free of glitches.

Lows

- Initially, the WLAE-AG300N will set the radio mode automatically using DFS (Dynamic Frequency Selection) to determine the best band and channel. Where there is a lot of 2.4GHz wireless activity, it might select a 5GHz channel. If this occurs, you won't discover the Buffalo access point with older gear. But you can easily fix this via the web interface.
- Few devices support AOSS, only the newer Nintendo hand-held consoles, the Wii, PSPs running newer firmware and the PS3.

HCC VERDICT

Buffalo AirStation WLAE-AG300N
£40 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

TOSHIBA BDX3200 → £150 Approx → www.home-entertainment.toshiba.co.uk

Back to basics suits the bank

Toshiba's feature-light 3D deck fails to excite **Danny Phillips**

Toshiba's Blu-ray players have never been cutting-edge affairs, but the company has wholeheartedly embraced 3D. The BDX3200 is its latest 3D-ready effort and with its £150 price tag should appeal to those on a budget – although Sony's BDP-S480 (see page 75) costs the same amount and offers much more in functionality.

Highs

- The BDX3200 is easy on the eye, with slim bodywork (42.5mm high) and a sleek black finish.
- I had absolutely no trouble using the player, thanks to the uncomplicated menu system and its responsiveness to remote commands. Disc loading times are fairly fast, taking 50 seconds to load *Terminator Salvation*.
- It boasts a surprisingly wide range of picture adjustments, grouped as Video Processing and Motion Video Processing. These let you alter the usual parameters, as well as offering presets, noise reduction and tweaks for individual colours. Get the settings spot on and the deck delivers impressive 2D and 3D pictures.
- The front-mounted USB port provides media playback and supports MKV and DivX HD.

Lows

- The feature set is decidedly lacking. Wi-fi support (built-in or dongle), network streaming, smartphone control, built-in BD Live memory, a second HDMI output and 2D-to-3D conversion are all absent. Toshiba also missed a trick by not adding its new Toshiba Places internet portal to its player.
- The picture adjustments should have been grouped into a single menu, as some of the settings overlap – without careful use you can end up spoiling the picture.

HCC VERDICT

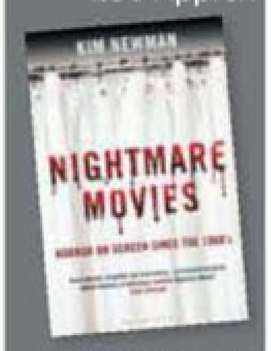
Toshiba BDX3200
£150 Approx

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5



In Brief

Nightmare Movies
Bloomsbury Publishing, £30 Approx



It's 20 years since film critic Kim Newman published the first edition of his exhaustive study of 'horror on the screen since the 1960s'. As such, this new edition is a welcome update, doubling the size of the content bringing Newman's wit to a swathe of new films

1 2 3 4 **5**

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Dune's Blu-ray box goes the extra mile

All modern Blu-ray players have some networkability, but the B1 is better-connected than any of them, reckons **Martin Pipe**

Dune's feature-packed Blu-ray player resembles a dull black external PC drive. There's no fluorescent track/time display, while the only controls are for disc eject and standby. You do, however, benefit from a SD slot and USB port for storage devices. Two more of the latter lurk on the rear panel, which is well-stocked in other regards.

There's the obligatory Ethernet port and HDMI, plus optical digital audio and a panoply of analogue AV output options that don't, alas, extend to multichannel audio. Unusually, there's an eSATA port, to which external hard drives can be attached, next to a proprietary jack for remote control applications. The eSATA exists solely to give playback and potential access to a hard-drive-based library of audio, video and photography. The external power supply is an external type, again owing to space constraints.

However, Dune's 'head unit' goes further. On the manufacturer's website, you can buy a DVB-T (standard-def only) digital terrestrial tuner stick for €40. Plug one (or two, if simultaneous viewing and watching different channels is desired) into the rear-panel USB socketry and your eSATA-ported B1 will double as a PVR. It's an example of the player's modular design; other (unspecified) 'extension modules' can be added too. In the absence of the requisite hardware, though, we were unable to try out the TV functions. The website warns that the EPG, which is essential for quick and easy timer setting, will only be supported with a future firmware upgrade.

Add your own memory

Such updates are delivered to the player via the 'net. When one is

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Release: StoreMags & FantaMag



Unusally, this IT-chic player sports an eSATA port to provide access to a hard drive

AV/CV

Product: Compact Blu-ray player with added extras

Positioning: The more affordable of Dune's two Blu-ray offerings

Peers: Apart from its bigger brother, the Smart B1 is currently unique

available, you're alerted with an onscreen message when the player starts up. For what is an otherwise advanced player, it comes as a shock to learn that there's insufficient internal memory for such data – you have to plug in a storage device of appropriate capacity. External memory is also essential should you wish to access BD-Live features on Blu-ray discs.

Networking provides some other useful functions. Just about every modern Blu-ray player integrates a media player that can pull audio and video from a networked PC or storage device, yet the reliability and media-compatibility of this feature tend to be unpredictable. Not so the B1, which is compatible with both the uPnP protocol (as supported by the majority of Blu-ray players) and SMB/Samba (network-shared folders and files). In terms of media support, the list is impressive.

I managed to play off-air MPEG2 transport streams, DVD rips, MP4 and MKV HD content, MP3 and FLAC audio and more. Support for subtitles (.SRT files) is also available. The only format that gave trouble was Flash video (FLV), but to be fair, only a handful of dedicated networked media players (such as Eminent's EM8060) can deal with this.

Like that Eminent player, which lacks a Blu-ray drive, the B1 can tune into internet radio and some online video content. Web browsing is another possibility, although the typical PC experience is far superior. But with an external HDD plugged in, you can use the B1 like a PC as a BitTorrent client. I doubt somehow that we'll see a feature like this on players from brands such as Sony and Panasonic. The B1 has an SMB server built in, and so other networkable devices (PCs, players) will be able to access files stored on that connected storage device – even with a Blu-ray playing.

Performance

Configuring the B1 is fairly easy as a wizard takes you through the basic steps. Other parameters can be modified with a set of menus – if you're using a 1080p-compatible display, we recommend changing the video output mode to auto (24p/25p/30p). Otherwise it defaults to 25p and some rather juddery Blu-ray replay. In common with some big-brand Blu-ray players, the default loading screen gives you a choice of the various replay options: optical disc, network, internet radio, local storage, web browser and so on. The design here is functional, rather than attractive. It's just as well that playback quality more than makes up for the basic user interface.

With a BD of romantic thriller *The Tourist*, I was rewarded – after something of a wait – with pristine detail and vibrant colours. The accompanying hi-res soundtracks, pumped into my Onkyo AVR via HDMI, are punchy yet subtle when needed.

Audio and network video also fared well, although TV transport streams revealed a bug – the handset's 'review' function went in the forward direction! Furthermore, the internet radio and IPTV functions failed to work even after a firmware upgrade. DVDs were handled adeptly, though, and I could find no serious fault with the units deinterlacing and upscaling capabilities. Multimedia playback is certainly as good as that from decent dedicated players.

I also discovered that our B1 sample was multiregion DVD. If yours isn't, a firmware patch is available to download that will add this welcome feature plus Blu-ray zone selection.

In all, the Dune Smart B1 is worth considering if you want a Blu-ray player that's a little different...

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

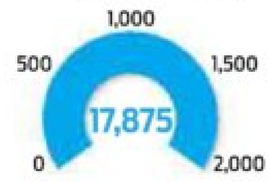


Idling: More power-hungry than most BD decks



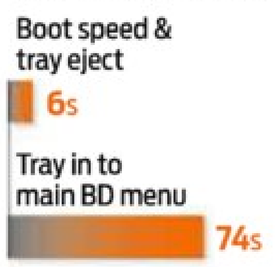
Playing: Not much difference with Blu-ray playback

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: A woeful figure that suggests the Dune's analogue outputs should be avoided

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: Pretty quick to boot, but loading times are tardy

→ Specifications

3D: *NO*
Upscaling: *YES* to 1080p
Multi-region: *NO* But patch can be downloaded
Component output: *YES* 480i/p, 576i/p, 720p, 1080i
Scart: *NO* Composite available, though.
HDMI: *YES* One HDMI v1.3 output
Upscaling: *YES* Up to 1080p (HDMI)
Digital audio outputs: *YES* Optical
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD decoding: *YES*
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD bitstream: *YES*
SACD/DVD-A: *NO/NO*
Profile 2.0: *YES* (external memory needed for BD-Live)
Dimensions: 142(w) x 65(h) x 276(d)mm
Weight: 1.6kg
Also featuring: Convertible into standard-def PVR via USB DTT 'stick'; 3 x USB ports (1 on front panel); wi-fi (with optional USB adaptor); front-panel SD slot; eSATA port; internet radio and IPTV support; network multimedia player with comprehensive format compatibility and SMB/uPnP support; SMB server; BitTorrent client; built-in Web browser; optional IR keyboard



HCC VERDICT

Dune Smart B1
£240 Approx

Highs: Decent performer; compact in size; probably the most network-enabled Blu-ray player yet
Lows: One or two minor bugs; no full 3D compatibility; external storage needed for BD-Live

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

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Blu-ray gets smart

Steve May auditions a quartet of Blu-ray decks that offer so much more than just hi-def movie playback



SAMSUNG
BD-D7500
£250 Approx
Ultra-thin 3D Blu-ray player with integrated wi-fi and Smart Hub access – so chic it hurts!

PHILIPS
BDP-7600
£199 Approx
Distinctive-looking 3D deck with integrated wi-fi and unrestricted web browsing

SONY
BDP-S480
£150 Approx
Well-equipped 3D Blu-ray deck boasting SACD compatibility and Qriocity-powered movie streaming

PANASONIC
DMP-BDT310
£260 Approx
Feature rich 3D spinner with VieraCast net portal and some cool audio-visual refinements

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Supreme silicon

The DMP-BDT310 offers a purist's performance – but no App service



Panasonic's Blu-ray players have always come across as a little swotty. Dour of appearance yet packed with advanced silicon, they've made a point of pushing picture processing to the edge, but somehow they've lacked that certain *je ne sais* cool.

The brand has set out to address that with its range-topping, 3D ready DMP-BD310. Not only has the player's user interface been given a much needed makeover, but there's an abundance of innovative functions to broaden its appeal.

For example, you no longer have to prod buttons to open the disc tray. Instead, a mere wave in its general direction opens said tray, courtesy of a motion sensor in the lid.

You can also customise the player with your own wallpaper. Upload a hi-res JPEG of your choice and it becomes the new home screen. A decidedly cool embellishment!

The deck doesn't offer integrated wi-fi. Instead, Panasonic sells a dedicated dongle, the DY-WL10, which looks uncannily like an elephant beetle. Alternatively, you can use a wired Ethernet connection.

Either way gets you to Panasonic's online content portal, although this is the VieraCast iteration (also featured on its SC-BTT775, reviewed page 66) not the new VieraConnect service featured on its TVs. The key difference is that there's no cloud-based apps market to peruse. Still, there's a goodly amount on offer, including YouTube, Daily Motion and Acetrax.

Hit and miss media

The DMP-BD310 will stream sound and vision files, but there are caveats. The deck failed to play our AVI, MOV and MKV content from a networked NAS. The only success we had was with AVCHD. Support improves when you access files from a USB Flash drive or disc: MKVs work and AVIs play back with subtitles.

Curiously, across the very same network using the exact same files, Panasonic's 2011 TV models all successfully streamed this material. Such inconsistency within a brand's portfolio is a disappointment.

Where this player shines is with its audio visual performance.

Image quality is outstanding, with subtle tonal differences and details which move it ahead of the competition.

Audio fidelity is also terrific – we particularly like the brand's Tube Sound facility. Designed to emulate the sonic characteristics of early valve amplifiers, it's a great way of tuning the player's sonic output to match your system.

Feel the width

Three-dimensional picture performance is similarly fine. Bolstering 3D compatibility is a depth converter for 2D DVDs and Blu-rays and a curious new feature called Frame Width. This enables you to place a 'feathered' border around the edge of the picture. The colour of this frame can be changed from black to grey, blue or red. Panasonic says it makes 3D easier to watch, which is, of course, complete tosh.

The DMP-BD310 is the only player in our group test to offer two HDMI outputs. This lets users of non-3D compatible AVRs to route lossless Dolby TrueHD and DTS HD master Audio through an existing sound system, while sending 3D video to their new 3D TVs. So maybe it's smarter than you might think...

Streaming conundrum: The DMP-BDT310 fails to stream file types supported by the brand's 2011 TVs

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

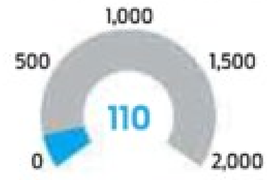


Idling: Probably the most eco-friendly BD deck we've ever seen



Playing: Even when playing a disc, this won't bother the ice-caps

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: An excellent low-jitter reading makes this a great CD player

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject 5s

Tray in to main BD menu 40s

Disc loading & Java: The DMP-BDT310 is in the top tier as far as speed is concerned



Transform your system

The DMP-BDT310's Skype functionality brings video chat to your bigscreen

Buyers of Panasonic's deck can get access to Skype – the free VOIP service – by splashing out on the brand's USB connectable 'Communication Camera'. This £120 approx add-on features four multi-directional microphones, meaning cross-continent family chats come across loud and clear. Video calls benefit from 720p picture quality.



Internet explorer

Philips' newest deck offers a web browser and excellent media streaming



Philips has created a thing of beauty with its 7 Series 3D Blu-ray deck. Finished in a greyish-silver and sporting a sculpted lip with illuminated soft-touch buttons, it's a real step up from the humdrum.

The company has long advocated online connectivity for its gear, famously launching its own Connected Planet product line back when most of us were still getting online with steam-powered modems.

The brand was way ahead of its time. Philips' Connected Planet strategy faltered and now it's being forced to play catch-up. **However, rather than create a walled-garden of IPTV like its rivals, the Dutch giant is endeavouring to establish a common standard of sorts, called Net TV**. This loose confederation of entertainment services will also be offered by Loewe and Sharp on selected product lines.

Be 'appy

The *smorgasbord* that is Net TV is accessed via a simple grid system. Buttons lead through to an App Gallery where you'll find the BBC iPlayer, YouTube, Picasa, Twitter, TuneIn Radio and CineTrailers. Apart from the free VOD, paid streaming channels are also available, including Cartoon Network, Box Office 365 and Hit Entertainment.

You can add more content to the launch page from the frugally stocked apps store. If you've been looking for a French language news channel, or a wallpaper screensaver of classical art, then you're in luck.

Perhaps the best supplemental content service currently on offer is iConcert; this has a broad range of music videos on tap which can be searched by artist or genre. The streaming clips may be in SD but they look pretty good.

If you want to venture out into the open web, the BDP7600 also offers a browser, but it lacks Flash support.

While only one HDMI output is offered, there are 5.1 analogue outputs, which can be used to route lossless multichannel sound to a legacy AVR. This 5.1 output can be bumped to a 7.1 if you re-assign the separate stereo AV outs to the group.

The unit doesn't have any persistent memory, so you'll need to add your own. Unusually, this has to be done in the form of an SD card rather than USB. Remember, though, that the rear-placed card slot doesn't permit playback of media. For that you'll need to use the front-mounted USB.

Media streaming support is excellent. The player successfully accessed all our test files across a network, including AVIs, MOVs and MKV wrapped material, and also played them direct from USB. Audio support covers WMA, MP3, WAV and AAC, with album art when present.

When it comes to disc playback, the BDP-7600 doesn't disappoint. Blu-rays look suitably detailed, with smoothly gradated colours and scads of texture. The player's two-channel audio presentation is also above average, making this a good choice for CD fans.

The BDP7600 is the fastest loader in our group by the tiniest of margins, but takes a while to wake.

It should also be noted that our test sample ran extremely hot. The right rear underside of the unit became uncomfortably warm after just a few hours use.

Legacy lover: The BDP7600's analogue phono outputs mean it can be hooked up to a non-HDMI AVR

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Not as green as some its rivals



Playing: When running a Blu-ray, we measured consumption at 14W



Analogue: Not as impressive as Panasonic's DMP-BDT310, but a low figure that suggests good component quality and system design

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

11s

Tray in to main BD menu

39s

Disc loading & Java: Quick to spin up our resident disc, but takes a while to boot



Transform your system

The iConcerts channel on Philips' Net TV is a must for fans of live music

Of the VoD services available on Philips' BDP7600, we suspect BBC's iPlayer may get the most use, but it's definitely worth checking out iConcerts, too. This channel provides a wealth of live music clips, from a wide variety of artists – including young tyros like Lady Ga-Ga alongside the likes of Paul McCartney – and it's easy to search thanks to an intuitive interface and genre/artist parameters. HD videos would be welcome, though.

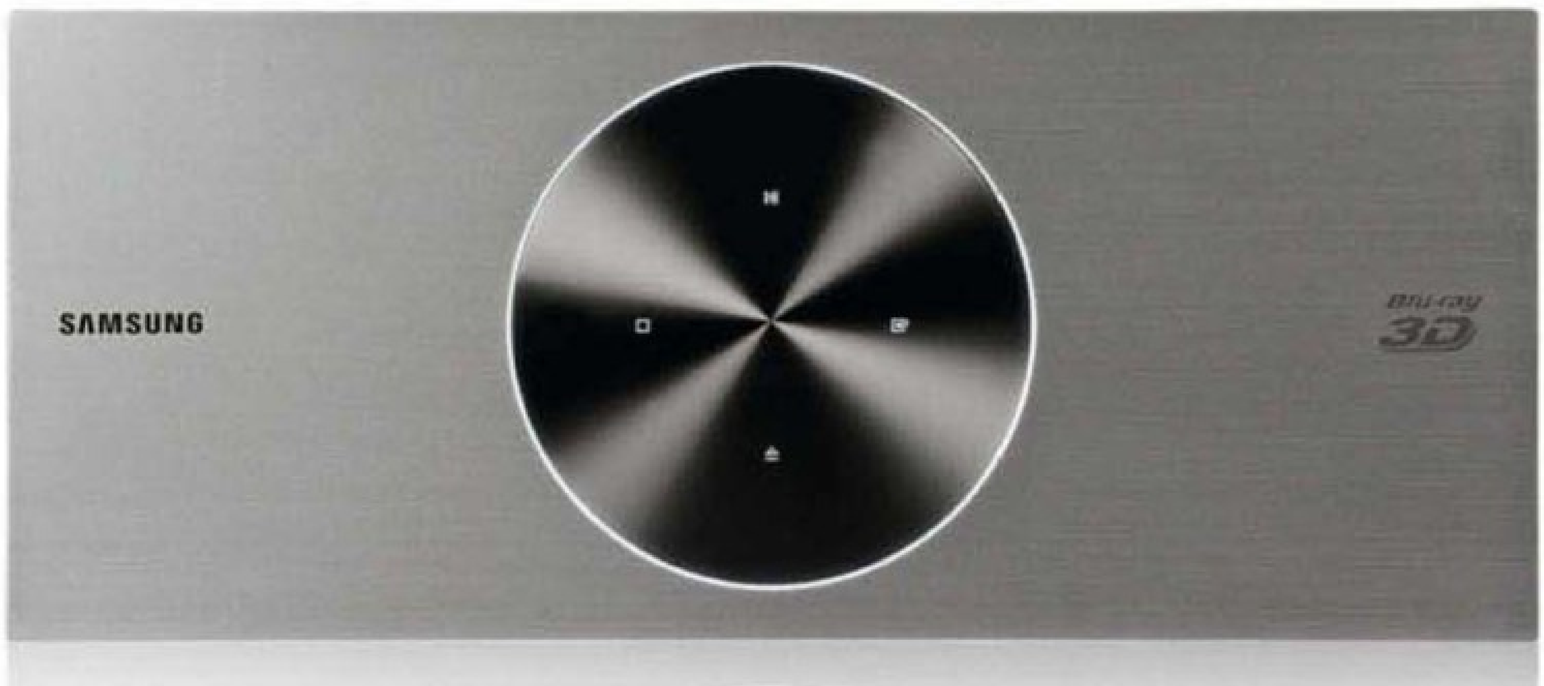


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Unconventional cool

Samsung's ultra-thin deck is more proof of the brand's style ambitions



Designer disc-spinner: Samsung's sliver of silver is certainly stylish

This achingly petite BD player claims to be the world's smallest Blu-ray player and it's more of a lifestyle statement than a traditional AV component. Available in trendy silver or gloss black, it's a remarkable example of 'Harry Potter' engineering.

Because of its size, there are no rear-panel connections. Instead, outputs have been consigned to a small cavity on the undercarriage. Consequently, if you use anything other than cheap HDMI cables you'll have to abandon any plans to rack this conventionally. Fat cables will lift the player clean off its feet.

Inside said cavity there's provision for a single HDMI output, digital optical audio and mini-jack AV out (a mini-jack to phono AV lead is supplied in the box), plus Ethernet. wi-fi is integrated.

If you are foiled by its thinness, you can use the cute, angled pedestal supplied. The player will also wall mount via brackets are supplied in the box. There's a slot loader on the right hand side of the player with a USB slot for media playback or BD-Live storage to the left.

Samsung's user interface remains a treat to use, and is the most approachable in our group. Animated menus guide you around, connecting to either networked devices or the brand's internet Smart Hub portal. Presented here this version looks much like it does on the brand's TVs, bar the open web browser.

Full fat Apps

Samsung has created the richest online platform when it comes to general content. A fast growing apps store offers plenty of causal games plus left-field infotainment, such as *How to Tie a Tie* and *Yoga Helper*. There's also a big selection of streaming video options, including the BBC iPlayer, YouTube, DailyMotion, Vimeo and Acetracks. Social media is covered by clients for Facebook and Twitter, with Picasa, AccuWeather and Google Maps, too.

Also part of the Smart Hub package is a Your Videos section which is a kind of IMDb-lite. It would make more sense if you could stream movies from within it, but that's not an option (at present).

While most of the VoD is FOC, there is a subscription service in the form of Box Office 365.

Not only is the player 3D Blu-ray compatible, it has 2D-to-3D picture processing onboard. Of all the various faux 3D processes available, Samsung's is probably the best currently available.

Media playback from USB covers all the bases. The deck decoded and played AVIs (with subtitles), MP4, MP3 and WMA, and had no problem with HD video in WKV wrappers. I had less success pulling content from a NAS across our network, with only AVIs available for streaming.

Picture quality from the BD-D7500 is very good. There's a clinical precision to its images which is easy to appreciate, but it's less enticing as a CD player, though.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

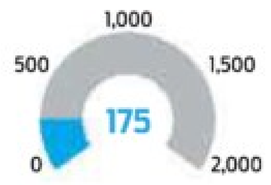


Idling: A few Watts higher than its Panasonic rival



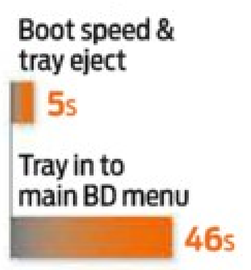
Playing: The increase in consumption when playing is only 2W

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: The highest measurement in this group test, but still a decent figure

Loading: Boot/Java



Disc loading & Java: Fast to wake up, but not as quick as the Philips' deck to load



Transform your system

Make your TV a giant atlas courtesy of Google Maps via Samsung's BD deck

Samsung's Smart Hub portal is chock full of content, including social networking tools and VoD services, but one of our favourite apps is the somewhat less glamorous Google Maps. Those who have become used to using this map service on a PC will relish the chance to see satellite views of their next-door neighbour's garden on a bigscreen TV. And it's a doddle to use.



The God of VoD

The BDP-S480 offers so much on-tap entertainment, you may never spin a disc



Sony's BDP-S570 player was a runaway hit during 2010, hoovering up more awards than the clean-up crew at the BAFTAs – so this closely related follow-up has a lot to live up to.

Cosmetically, it's only marginally different from its forebear. The player is extremely thin with a cute curvy front fascia and a stumpy little remote. The latter doesn't look particularly natty, but it feels fine in the hand. Don't lose it – the buttons on the BDP-S480's front panel are so small you may never find them.

Speed demon

Last year's Sony players offered the fastest disc-loading times in their class. This year's models are bit more ponderous, although our Tech Labs recorded a boot-up time of only two seconds.

The player also speeds ahead with its online connectivity. The familiar Sony XrossMediaBar seamlessly integrates with the brand's Bravia Internet Video portal, offering up a long list of Video on Demand TV services.

Unlike many of its rivals, Sony hasn't really embraced the concept of downloadable apps. Instead its virtual shelves are stocked with copious amounts of IPTV content – and for telly addicts and AVholics this is really good news. Once connected to the 'net, there's a massive choice of stuff to peruse. BBC iPlayer and Demand 5 provide catch-up TV, there's news bites from Sky News and Eurosport, while general entertainment comes via LOVEFiLM, YouTube, Daily Motion, and Sony Entertainment Television. That's a whole night's viewing entertainment before you've even loaded a disc.

And, amazingly, it doesn't end there. You can also stream movies in either SD or HD from Sony's Qriocity Video on Demand service, or listen to music if you subscribe to a Qriocity Music Unlimited package (good luck with those credit card details!). For extra net functions there's a web browser on board. While this lacks Flash support, it's nice to have to option for a quick Google.

Unlike the Samsung and Philips decks, wi-fi isn't integrated. For that you'll need to step up to Sony's BDP-S580 model. However, the brand will happily sell you a dongle. for £70. Or you could just use the Ethernet port.

One area where the BDP-S480 shines over last year's Sony BD players is file support. **Media streaming has been given a big boost with the ability to play MKVs from a networked NAS, as well as AVCHD and AVIs**. Audio file compatibility covers MP3, AAC, WAV and WMA. Media support via USB is much the same, although you do get access to SRT subtitles.

The deck failed to pull album art from our music server. However, if you spin a CD, it will go online and retrieve the sleeve from the Gracenote database, which is kind of smart.

Super sonic

Picture quality from the BDP-S480 is predictably terrific. Blu-rays drip with fine detail and colour fidelity is gorgeous. The player is also a great choice for music fans, being the only model here able to play hi-res Super Audio CDs. This multichannel music playback is stunning, easily giving this player an audible edge over others in the group.

Bargain Blu-ray: At £150, the BDP-S480 will appeal to cash-conscious AV-hedz

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts

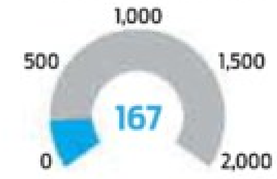


Idling: This low figure means your bills won't soar if you leave it on



Playing: Nor does power use rocket when the S480 is in full flight

Audio Jitter: ps



Analogue: 167ps is a good analogue jitter measurement, but we also recorded a below-par video jitter figure of 80ns

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject 2s

Tray in to main BD menu 43s

Disc loading & Java: The quickest booting deck we've tested

Disc delights: *Transformers* and *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* are available to buy on Blu-ray courtesy of Paramount Home Entertainment

Transform your system

The BDP-S480 lets you pull movies from the cloud with LOVEFiLM



Subscribers to LOVEFiLM, Europe's largest movie rental service, can take their account to another level with Sony's slimline disc-spinner – the BDP-S480 gives online access to a library of streamable titles. You can also manage your rental list via the service, ensuring a steady supply of Blu-rays through your letterbox. Non-members can gorge on movie trailers.

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Final standings



These models effortlessly blend disc playback with Video on Demand and network entertainment, and all of them are exciting propositions. So choosing between them is no easy task. Samsung's BD-D7500 is the prettiest, while the brand's Smart Hub is undeniably content rich. Philips' BD-7600 gives Samsung a run for its money when it comes to designer togs, and strides ahead in terms of performance. The brand's Net TV portal may be a tad eclectic, but its media playback talents are considerable.

Panasonic's DMP-BDT310 just edges ahead of the Philips. Picture quality is exceptional, the motion-sensing disc-tray is fun and VieraCast offers all the heavy IPTV hitters. And what's not to love about the customisable home screen? It does lack streaming finesse, though.

Our group test champion though is Sony. The BDP-S480 provides both a first-rate performance and 'net niceties. The brand has fixed a key failing of its 2010 models, by adding extensive network file support, while SACD compatibility will appeal to any AV-phile. For those looking for loads of streaming VoD TV and movies (rather than just downloadable games and apps), it tops our Smart chart as well. And at this end of the market it's hard to ignore its wallet-friendly £150 price tag

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Sony BDP-S480
£150 Approx

Highs: Rich, detailed picture quality; SACD compatibility
Lows: Slower disc loading; no downloadable apps

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Specifications

3D: *YES*
Upscaling: *YES* to to 1080p
Multiregion: *NO* Region B BD/ R2 DVD
HDMI: *YES* 1 output
Component: *YES* but no HD support for Blu-ray
Multichannel analogue: *NO*
Digital audio: *YES* coaxial
SACD/DVD-A: *YES/NO*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: *YES*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: *YES*
Profile 2.0: *YES*
Dimensions: 430(w) x 199(d) x 36(h)mm
Weight: 1.7kg
Features: 3D Blu-ray; Integrated web browser; Bravia Internet Video service; Ethernet; USB; Qriocity VOD and music services; DLNA certified; extensive media file support (including MKV, AVI, AVCHD); optional wi-fi dongle

2ND



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic DMP-BDT310
£260 Approx

Highs: Blistering pictures and audio; twin HDMI outputs
Lows: Limited file support; VieraCast lacks apps

Performance: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Specifications

3D: *YES*
Upscaling: *YES* to to 1080p
Multiregion: *NO* Region B BD/ R2 DVD
HDMI: *YES* 2 outputs
Component: *NO*
Multichannel analogue: *NO*
Digital audio: *YES* optical
SACD/DVD-A: *NO/NO*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD MA decoding: *YES*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: *YES*
Profile 2.0: *YES*
Dimensions: 430(w) x 185(d) x 35(h)mm
Weight: 1.6kg
Features: 3D Blu-ray; 2D-3D conversion; bonkers Frame Width feature; Ethernet; USB; Skype camera connection; DLNA certified; VieraCast portal; media file support (MKV, AVI via USB); Tube sound processing

3RD



HCC VERDICT

Philips BDP-7600
£200 Approx

Highs: Slick design; fast disc-loading; multichannel analogue audio outputs
Lows: Runs hot; thin Net TV

Performance: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Design: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Specifications

3D: *YES*
Upscaling: *YES* to to 1080p
Multiregion: *NO* Region B BD/ R2 DVD
HDMI: *YES* 1 output
Component: *YES* but no HD support for Blu-ray
Multichannel analogue: *YES* 7.1 phono
Digital audio: *YES* optical and coaxial
SACD/DVD-A: *NO/NO*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: *YES*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: *YES*
Profile 2.0: *YES*
Dimensions: 435(w) x 236(d) x 43(h)mm
Weight: 1.7kg
Features: 3D Blu-ray; Ethernet; DLNA certified; Net TV content portal; USB media streaming; integrated wi-fi; extensive network file support including AVIs and MKV

4TH



HCC VERDICT

Samsung BD-D7500
£250 Approx

Highs: Slim design; wall-mountable; integrated wi-fi
Lows: Uneven media streaming file support; poor cable access

Performance: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Design: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Features: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 3 **4** 5

→ Specifications

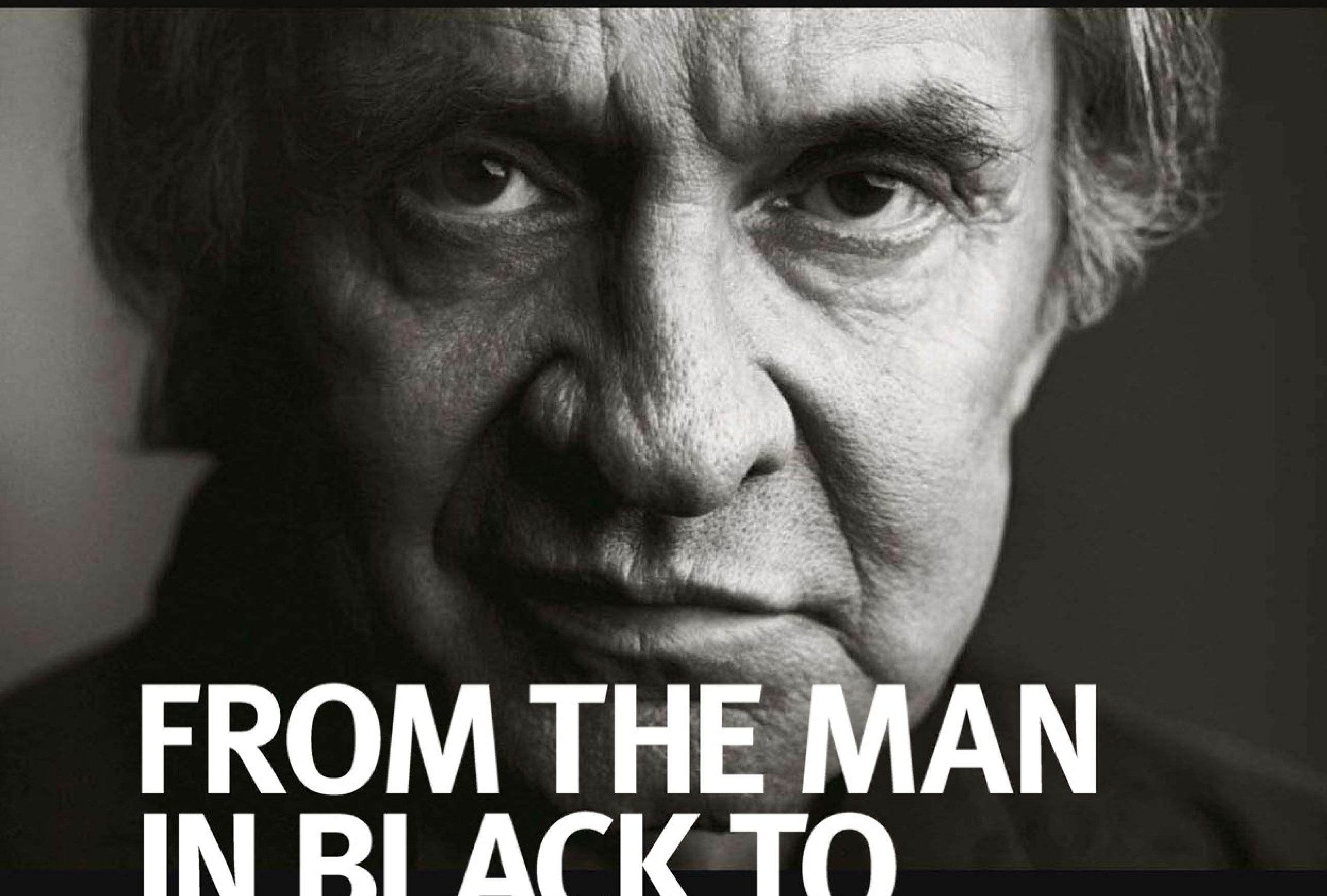
3D: *YES*
Upscaling: *YES* to to 1080p
Multiregion: *NO* Region B BD/ R2 DVD
HDMI: *YES* 1 output
Component: *NO*
Multichannel analogue: *NO*
Digital audio: *YES* optical
SACD/DVD-A: *NO/NO*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: *YES*
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: *YES*
Profile 2.0: *YES*
Dimensions: 380(w) x 158(d) x 23(h)mm
Weight: 0.9kg
Features: 3D Blu-ray; Ethernet; DLNA certified; Smart Hub content portal; USB media playback for AVIs, MOVs and MKV, All-Share content playback

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Finishing touches

Adrian Justins trawls the shelves for those must-have home cinema extras



ACER ASPIRE Z5763

Approx £1,000

Billed as the 'ultimate home entertainment centre', Acer's new designer PC certainly packs a technological punch, with its 23in Full HD monitor, Blu-ray disc drive, NVIDIA 3D Vision technology and Dolby Home Theatre v4-tuned speaker system. Other key specs include a 1TB hard drive, Intel Core™ i3-2100 Dual Core processor and 4GB RAM. Furthermore, Acer's proprietary AirControl technology lets you whizz around your media *Minority Report*-style by simply waving your hand, and you even get a set of active shutter 3D spex thrown in, which is more than some TV manufacturers manage to do.

www.acer-group.com

HCC VERDICT

When did PCs become this cool?

CADILLAC SOFA

Approx £1,600

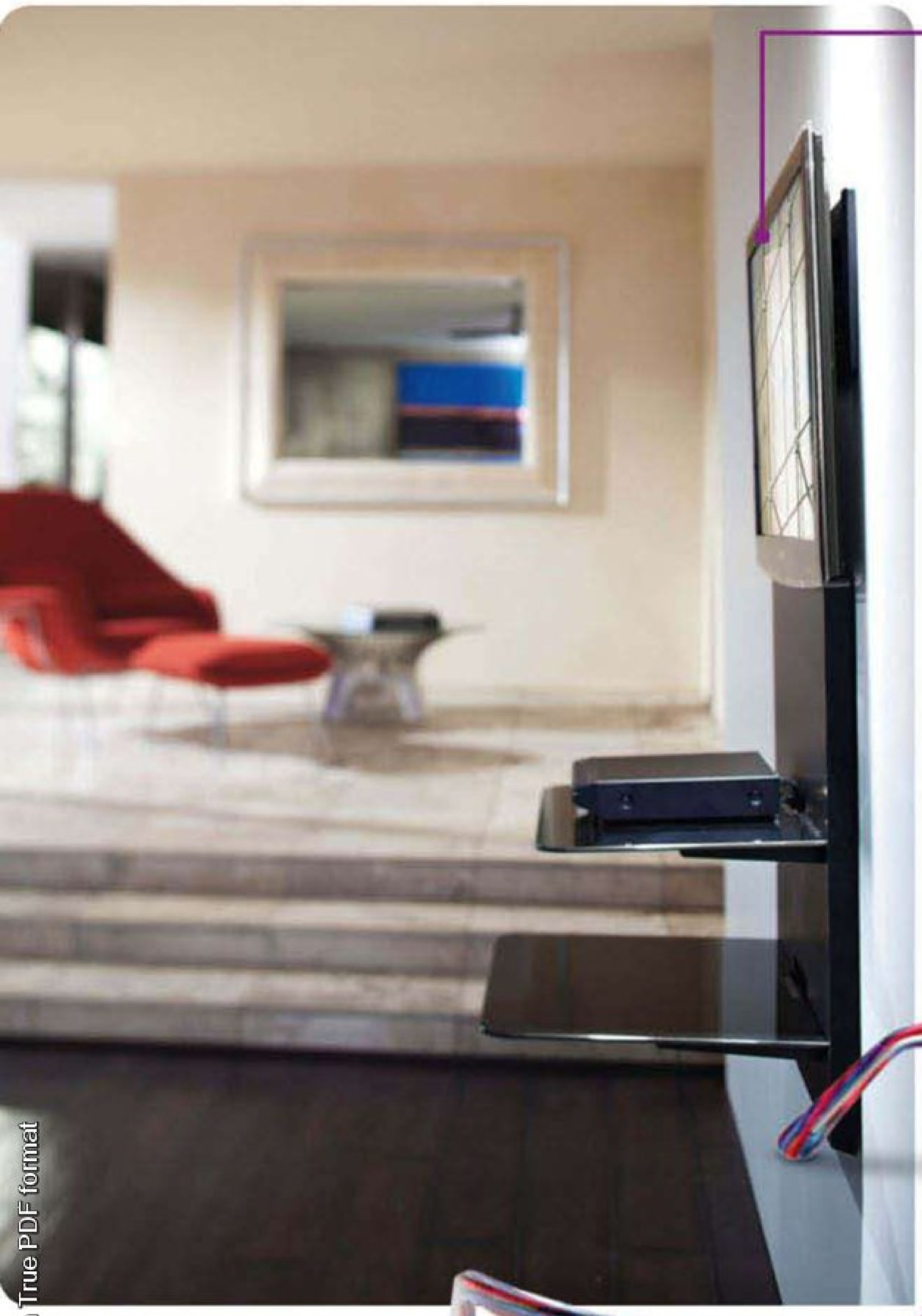
If you're planning a retro-themed home cinema room, this Cadillac Sofa from online retailer Drinkstuff could be the perfect finishing touch. The two-seater sofa features resin side wings accurately moulded from a 1959 Coupe de Ville, plus illuminating side-lights, and is available in pink, red and black finishes. It doesn't come with a DVD of *Happy Days*, but it probably should.

www.drinkstuff.com

HCC VERDICT

It's just like being at the Drive-In





OMNIMOUNT BLADE TV MOUNT

Approx £200

The clue is in the name. With a profile of just 30mm, the Blade is one of the slinkiest TV wall mount around, designed to complement the key aesthetic element of the latest super-skinny edge-lit LED screens. Ease of use figures high in the Blade's list of attributes. The frame is supplied fully assembled and simple to wall-mount, and the tempered black glass shelves are deep and strong enough to accommodate most decks, set-top boxes and games consoles. Integrated cable management behind the covers allows cables to be concealed without running them inside the wall. It's also available with one shelf for £130.

www.omnimount.com

HCC VERDICT

Now all we need are 30mm-deep disc players and PVRs



GILES FOR LG

Approx £30

Let's face it, the spex that LG gives away with its Cinema 3D TVs aren't exactly the epitome of cool. Step forward British fashion designer Giles Deacon, who has come up with these limited edition 'ultra stylish' googles that you can only snap up at Selfridges. The £30 Giles for LG glasses may be a little too pink for our tastes, but they're certainly comfortable to wear, and Disney Princesses will love 'em.

www.selfridges.com

HCC VERDICT

A neat idea – but why pink?

GENEVA SOUND MODEL M BAR 1

Approx £549

GenevaLab's latest product is designed to tempt hi-fi purists to enter the MP3 waters. The Model M is a shoe box-sized stereo speaker system with an iPod dock that can also accept uncompressed audio from a computer by plugging a wi-fi receiver dongle into its stereo 3.5mm line input.

Built around a high-class chassis, the Model M's speaker system comprises four drivers (two tweeters and two woofers), each housed in its own dedicated chamber with a separate Class D digital amp. Other features include TouchLight controls hidden beneath a hinged top-plate and an LED display that shines through the grille to indicate volume, source, track and frequency.



www.genevalab.com

HCC VERDICT

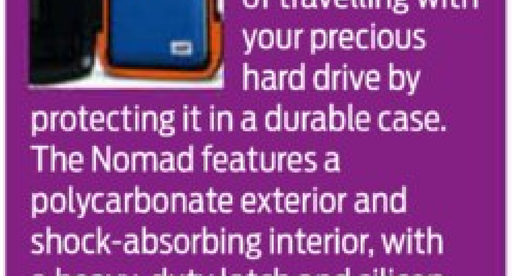
An iPod dock for audiophiles

Clips...

Small items that will make a big difference to your system

Philips FlexAdapt

Approx £20



Available in five colours – three of them garish shades – this versatile stand is designed to flex into different shapes and offer hassle-free USB charging and syncing with iTunes for your iPod, iPad or iPhone.
www.philips.com

WD Nomad Rugged Case



Approx £20

Take the fear out of travelling with your precious hard drive by protecting it in a durable case. The Nomad features a polycarbonate exterior and shock-absorbing interior, with a heavy-duty latch and silicon liner keeping out dirt, dust, and moisture.
www.wdc.com

Ross High Performance HDMI cable



Approx £20

Oxygen-free copper cables, 24K gold-plated connectors and multi-shielded construction – all attributes of a high-end cable and reassuringly used in the latest lineup from Ross. The High Performance ranges includes 1m, 2m and 3m length HDMI leads.
www.ross.co.uk

Crystal Acoustics MediaMatchbox

Approx £50



Crystal Acoustics' newest dinky media player delivers HD video up to 1080p via its HDMI output, supports 5.1 multichannel audio, and is compatible with most common file formats including DivX, BD-ISO, WMV, AAC and FLAC.
www.crystalaudiovideo.com

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PLAYBACK

→Software highlights **LIMITLESS** Brain-boosting thriller passes the Blu-ray test **THE RITE** Anthony Hopkins exorcises his demons **IRONCLAD** Medieval mayhem in 'gory-ous' HD **THE ADJUSTMENT BUREAU** On the run with Matt Damon (again) **AKIRA** Anime legend reborn **DON'T LOOK NOW** Nic Roeg's remastered chiller makes a splash in hi-def **AND MUCH MORE!**



'We wants it! We needs it!'

The Lord of the Rings : Motion Picture Trilogy – Extended Edition → Entertainment in Video → Region B BD/R2 DVD

Turn to p86 to find out why our expert reviewers think this epic 15-disc collection is the Blu-ray boxset to rule them all

HCC Ratings key

Gandalf	1 2 3 4 5
Lo-Pan	1 2 3 4 5
Tim the Enchanter	1 2 3 4 5
Miracle Max	1 2 3 4 5
The Wiz	1 2 3 4 5



Lord of the collectors' items

Longer, more colour co-ordinated and with exemplary audio, the LotR trilogy is back

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HCC VERDICT

The Lord of the Rings: Motion PIcture Trilogy – Extended Edition → EiV → Region B BD/R2 DVD → £70 Approx

We say: Deserves a place in every home cinema fan's collection

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The Lord of the Rings: The Motion Picture Trilogy – Extended Edition

delivers three of the biggest films in the history of cinema and restores a huge amount of deleted material to each (running from around half an hour in *The Fellowship of the Ring* to almost an hour in *The Return of the King*). You know the rest...

Chris Jenkins on picture: In response to the wave of complaints that greeted the BD of theatrical cut, this Extended Edition set features a brand-new transfer of ...*Fellowship of the Ring* taken from the original 2K digital files (ie. the highest resolution source for the film that exists). So you'd expect everything to be fine. However, director Peter Jackson and DoP Andrew Lesnie have played around with the colour grading, pushing green and cyan heavier in many sequences (resulting in blue snow in one scene), which aligns the first film's colour temperature with that of the sequels, but may upset purists.

All three extended cuts are split across two BD50 discs, allowing the studio to maximise the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encodes and eliminate any trace of banding or artefacting. My only minor quibble is that the post-production tinkering robs the films of some fine detailing in places and crushes blacks in some other scenes, but these are the unavoidable side-effects of conscious decisions made by the filmmakers.

Mark Craven on audio: Picture issues aside, I reckon everyone is going to be happy with the audio on these BDs – all three films feature DTS-HD MA 6.1 mixes that sound absolutely superb. From the booming bass of the battle with the Balrog to the ridiculously aggressive dynamics during the scraps at Helm's Deep and the Pelennor Fields, these are some of the very best lossless soundtracks available anywhere..

Anton van Beek on extras: Each of the films gets five discs – two Blu-rays for the movie itself (each accompanied by four commentary tracks and a couple of old DVD Easter Eggs, now plain to see on the menus), and then a trio of DVDs packed with supplementary material.

The first two DVDs accompanying each film play home to *The Appendices*, a wealth of behind-the-scenes documentaries, featurettes, animatics, art and photo galleries, interactive maps and more, covering pretty much every aspect of the production. Thankfully, there's a comprehensive index making it easy to track down content you're particularly interested in.

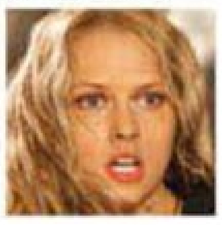
This still leaves one DVD for each film unaccounted for. These are taken up by Costa Botes' superbly insightful feature-length, fly-on-the-wall documentaries for each of the films.



Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

I Am Number Four

Walt Disney → All-region BD
£25 Approx



This amiable teen-orientated sci-fi flick stars Alex Pettyfer as the titular teen (one of a group of super-powered aliens hiding from extraterrestrial assassins on our planet), while *Glee*'s Diane Aragon plays the earth girl who falls for his enigmatic stranger routine. Along the way there's a plenty of action and it all climaxes with an SFX showcase that makes the most of the punchy DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix and pin-sharp AVC 1.85:1 1080p visuals. Forgettable extras include six deleted scenes, bloopers and a featurette on actress Teresa Palmer. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

No Strings Attached

Paramount → All-region BD → £25 Approx

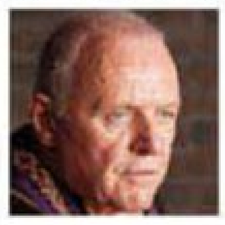


Director Ivan Reitman was never going to recapture the comedy magic of his early flicks like *Stripes* and *Ghostbusters*. But we were still completely unprepared for anything as awful as this joke-free rom-com about modern relationships. The sharpness and clarity of Blu-ray's AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode will be a godsend to those who simply want to see Natalie Portman in her underwear, but the understated DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is unlikely to thrill anyone. Dull extras include deleted scenes, a commentary and three featurettes. ***AvB***

1 **2** 3 4 5

The Rite: Triple Play

Warner Home Video → All-region BD → £25 Approx



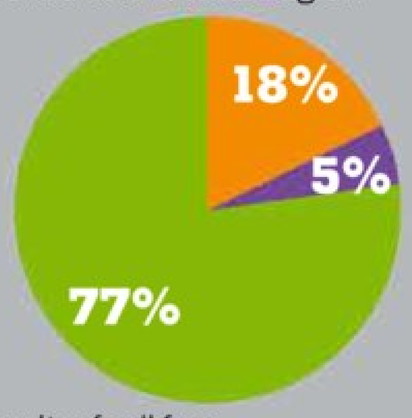
Apparently 'inspired by true events', *The Rite* breaks the rule of horror cinema – it simply isn't scary. This alone is a real problem, and it's only compounded by the fact that it's a debate about faith wrapped up in a story about exorcists, which instantly invites unflattering comparisons with William Friedkin's 1973 horror. The extras appear to be have exorcised too, but the Blu-ray does at least manage a crisp AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode that easily handles the dark photography, plus a surprisingly powerful DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. ***MC***

1 2 **3** 4 5

We asked you...

Is your home cinema capable of multi-region Blu-ray playback?

- Yes! I've got a hacked/modified Blu-ray player
- Yes – I've got multiple decks locked to different regions
- No – my Blu-ray player is locked to the local region



Results of poll from www.homecinemachoice.com

A life less programmed

He's a Congressman with congress on his mind, but that's not on



You can leave your hat on: Auditions for *The Full Monty* were well attended



The Adjustment Bureau

is the latest in a long line of Hollywood films that are inspired by the writings of Philip K Dick – in this case a loose adaptation of his 1954 short story, *The Adjustment Team*. Essentially a discussion of the play between free will and destiny masquerading as a sci-fi-infused romantic thriller, the film stars Matt Damon as a promising Congressman who falls for Emily Blunt's carefree dancer. Trouble is, destiny has other plans for the duo, and before long the mysterious agents of the Adjustment Bureau are hot on their tail and trying to keep the pair apart to ensure that everything runs as it should.

Chris Jenkins: While it's not always visually exciting, I'm sure that *The Adjustment Bureau*'s VC-1 1.85:1 1080p imagery is an accurate reflection of how the film is supposed to look. The palette favours greys and blacks, with some occasional warm browns and reds, all of which should make the film feel drab and oppressive. Yet the clarity and sharpness of the visuals ensures that this never happens, presenting you with a finely rendered and cinematic image.

Mark Craven: Considering *The Adjustment Bureau* is often a rather claustrophobic and oppressive affair, this Blu-ray comes with a surprisingly expansive DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 soundtrack that surrounds you with audio ambience. Chanting crowds sound every bit as large as they look, the streets of New York buzz with the noise of passing traffic and pedestrians, and there's some very inventive use of aural cues during the final location-hopping chase sequence.

Anton van Beek: Universal's disc is a prime example of coming up with ways of utilising Blu-ray's enhanced features without considering whether or not it's an enjoyable experience for consumers. *Labyrinth of Doors* is an interactive map that enables you to highlight 12 locations from the film and view interviews and behind-the-scenes footage. All well and good, but it's so slow and cumbersome that it quickly becomes a chore to work through. The remaining extras take the form of a director's commentary, six deleted/extended scenes, a trio of short production featurettes, D-Box functionality, My Scenes and a BD-Live link. The set also includes a DVD and Digital Copy. >



HCC VERDICT

The Adjustment Bureau: Triple Play → Universal
£25 Approx

We say: It's no *Bourne Identity* – but maybe worth a rent

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Extras: 1 **2** 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

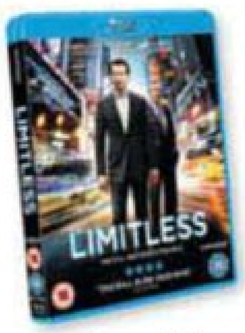


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Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

‘Lucy in the skies’ is diamond viewing

When a writer cures his block with a wonder drug, his world starts to change...



Limitless stars Bradley Cooper as failed writer, Eddie Mora, whose life is completely turned around when he gets his hands on an experimental drug that boosts his brainpower. Within days he’s not only finished his novel, but also made millions on the stock market and come to the attention of high-powered businessman Carl Van Loon (Robert De Niro). Trouble is, the pills are leaving him with gaps in his memory, one of which might connect him to a murder, and if that’s not enough, there’s also a Russian gangster who wants to get his hands on the wonder drug.

While the plot feels a little like an expanded episode of *The Twilight Zone*, *Limitless* ultimately overcomes any plotting problems thanks to its leading man and director. Cooper delivers another of those charismatic performances that show why he’s suddenly one of Hollywood’s hottest stars, while director Neil ‘*The Illusionist*’ Burger’s mind-bending imagery injects the story with incredible pace and energy.

Chris Jenkins: After an eye-poppingly vibrant title sequence (that will leave many wondering how they actually pulled it off), *Limitless*’ AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode comes down to earth with a bump as it settles into a rather drab, real-world palette. But once Eddie pops his first pill in Chapter 4, everything changes. Colours are suddenly much more vibrant, enhanced clarity and sharpness results in some insane amounts of fine detailing, and overall everything looks quite incredible. As the movie goes on the image yo-yos between the two visual styles, but never falters in delivering each perfectly.


He should have gone to a well-known optician

Mark Craven: While it never manages to surpass the disc’s image quality, this Blu-ray’s DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix does everything that’s asked of it with ease and assurance. The surrounds are often regularly engaged with ambient effects, while dialogue remains tightly pinned to the centre speaker. Some fast car action in the middle of the film gives your speakers a chance to really cut loose with some extremely aggressive effects, but that’s not really what the film is about, so you should probably temper your expectations.

Anton van Beek: This BD’s extra features are anything but limitless. Only the chat-track by director Neil Burger provides any real substance. Beyond that there’s just a pair of fairly bland featurettes, the theatrical trailer (the only extra not in high-definition) and a very slightly different alternate ending.

HCC VERDICT

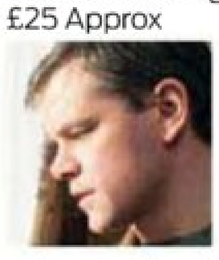
Limitless → Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£20 Approx

We say: While it’s not quite as smart as it thinks it is, this thriller sure looks the part in HD

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 4 5
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 5
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Hereafter: Triple Play

Warner → All-region BD
£25 Approx



This globetrotting flick attempts to meld the stories of a tsunami survivor, a 12-year-old boy whose twin brother is killed in a car crash and a tormented psychic. Unfortunately it struggles to find anything interesting to connect them. A rare misfire for director Clint Eastwood, it does at least benefit from cracking AVC 2.40:1 1080p visuals and DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics. Extras include nine behind-the-scenes featurettes and an 88-min presentation of *The Eastwood Factor* documentary (the US disc gets a 129-minute version). ***MC***

1 2 3 4 5

Submarine

Optimum → Region B BD → £25 Approx



Best known for playing computer nerd Maurice Moss in *The IT Crowd*, Richard Ayoade proves to be a gifted filmmaker with this comic coming-of-age drama. While the plot isn’t massively original, the combination of a superb young cast, witty scripting and Ayoade’s self-assured, French New Wave-inspired direction allows it to transcend this overworked genre. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is mainly concerned with dialogue and music, but the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode is a thing of true beauty. Extras include a commentary, interviews, two Q&As, deleted scenes and more. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

The Resident

Icon → Region B BD
£15 Approx



While best known for horror fodder such as its iconic Dracula and Frankenstein films, Hammer Film Productions also worked in many other genres, finding a modicum of success with psychological thrillers such as *Paranoiac* and *Nightmare*. This second production from the reborn company tries to follow in the same vein, but falls flat due to a lack of scares and laughably bad plotting. It looks very nice, though, thanks to a richly rendered AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode, and the DTS-MA 5.1 audio is surprisingly creative. A trailer and fairly dry director’s commentary are the only extras. ***MC***

1 2 3 4 5

The Silent House

Optimum → Region B BD
£20 Approx



This micro-budget Spanish-language chiller employs ingenuity rather than splashy special effects to deliver its thrills. Shot entirely as one 78-min continuous take, the film’s plot is nothing special (young woman, spooky house), but the effect it creates is a tour-de-force of mounting suspense and terror. The AVC 1.78:1 1080i encode reflects the original digital photography and, as such, mixes sharp close-ups with rather soft mid-shots. Much better is the DTS-HD MA 5.1, which aids the build-up of scares admirably. Sadly, the sole extra is the trailer. ***AvB***

1 2 3 4 5

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Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

It was a real man's job and not one for lily-livered vegans



Siege gets the cruellest cut

An under par HD release takes all the fun out of this blood-filled medieval action story

Ironclad is rather nicely summed up by its director – 'best described as a medieval *Magnificent Seven* or a medieval *Seven Samurai*'. A fictionalised retelling of the siege of Rochester Castle by King John's forces in 1215, the film stars Paul Giamatti as the regal despot, with James Purefoy's Templar knight and Brian Cox's baron holding the castle against him. It's very silly stuff, but filmed with so much gusto and gore that it's hard not to get caught up in the action.

Chris Jenkins: While this Blu-ray's AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode is technically sound and offers good detailing (especially in close-ups of the cast's grizzled faces) and accurate colour reproduction, Warner Home Video has really lost the aspect ratio plot.

Originally composed at 2.35:1, the Blu-ray serves up an obvious 1.78:1 crop of the film that excises large amounts of picture information from either side of the screen. Perhaps the most obvious example of how ruinous this is to the film comes in Chapter 6, when our horse-riding heroes line up on the top of a hill looking down on Rochester Castle.

What should have been a 'medieval *Magnificent Seven*' moment fails to be. Thanks to the footage snipped, it's more of a *Magnificent Five* moment, with glimpses of the other two horses edging into shot every now and again.

Mark Craven: If there's one bit of good news about this release, it's that the disc's presentation problems don't extend as far as the Dolby TrueHD (remember them?) 5.1 soundtrack. Indeed, it's a delightfully atmospheric mix that hits plenty of invigorating highs when the siege begins. The barrage of arrows and rocks flying through the sky provide copious opportunities for panning effects across the entire soundstage. My only real quibble is that the bass simply isn't potent enough for my taste – surely the toppling of a castle's stone tower, as seen in Chapter 22, should have a bit more impact than it does here?

Anton van Beek: The lack of care taken with this Blu-ray release extends to the disc's sole bonus feature. *Interviews with the Cast and Crew* is a 35-min reel of what must surely be raw EPK material waiting to be edited into promotional featurettes. Consequently absolutely nothing is provided by way of insight into the production, with the bland questions to director and cast running more along the lines of :'What is the film about?', 'What character do you play in the film?' and 'What attracted you to the part?' >





HCC VERDICT

Ironclad → Warner → All-region BD → £20 Approx

We say: This fun action flick is done a serious disservice by a compromised hi-def package

Picture: 1 **2** 3 4 5
Sound: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Extras: **1** 2 3 4 5
Movie: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Overall: 1 **2** 3 4 5

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Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Storedkeys.com

Justified: The Second Season

Sony Pictures → R2 DVD
£35 Approx



This superior cop show digs even deeper into the world of Harlan County, Kentucky and the people who live there, including a new crime matriarch and a strong-willed teenage girl who seem to have walked straight out of *Winter's Bone*. As good as the show is, it's frustrating that Sony Pictures refuses to release it on Blu-ray in the UK. This three-disc DVD set boasts impressive anamorphic 1.78:1 transfers and lively DD5.1 audio, but all we really want is an HD release for the show. Extras are limited to a single 18-min set tour. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Psychoville: Series 2

2entertain → All-region BD
£30 Approx

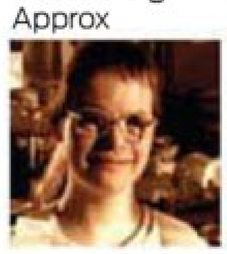


It's unlikely that this cult comedy will return to our screens for a third series, but at least it went out on a high with a stellar run of six funny, poignant and horrifying episodes that tied up all of the dangling plot threads – and killed off many of the fan-favourite characters. This two-disc Blu-ray release delivers well-encoded AVC 1.78:1 1080i50 episodes and the 48-min Halloween Special, but is let down by the plain Dolby Digital 2.0 audio. Extras include six episode commentaries, a Making of... and four character profiles. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

The Kingdom I & II: Broadcast Edition

Second Sight → Region R2 DVD → £35 Approx



Previously, only the first series of Lars Von Trier's TV show about supernatural occurrences at a Copenhagen hospital was available on DVD in the UK, and then only in the form of a four-hour cinema re-edit. This four-disc set brings both series in their original episodic form, alongside plentiful extras including a select scene commentary, a documentary about Von Trier and a lengthy interview. Admittedly, the Dolby 2.0 audio and 1.33:1 picture aren't great, but Von Trier himself stated, 'we did all kinds of things to make it look terrible'. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Akira

Manga → Region B BD
£20 Approx



After introducing the West to Japanese anime 23 years ago, Katsuhiro Otomo's sci-fi epic has lost none of its power and ability to wow viewers. This Blu-ray release is the perfect way to revisit the film thanks to its restored AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode. Imagery is pleasing, with a sharpness and colour fidelity the DVDs could never capture. However, the disc's biggest triumph is the 'hypersonic' 192kHz Japanese Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix, a remarkably rich and powerful soundtrack. Extras are few: five trailers and 737 pages of Otomo's hand-drawn storyboards. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

Pulp flick is a bit of rough

Swords 'n' sorcery fun romp doesn't clean up well



HCC VERDICT

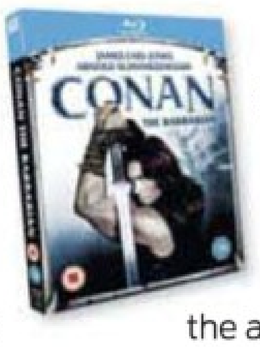
Conan the Barbarian
20th Century Fox
All-region BD
£20 Approx

We say: A mediocre HD disc for one of Arnie's best-loved films

Picture: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Sound: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Extras: 1 2 **3** 4 5
Movie: 1 2 3 **4** 5

Overall: 1 2 **3** 4 5

Conan the Barbarian



may not be particularly faithful to Robert E Howard's original pulp writing, but this 1982 flick is a rollicking piece of fantasy filmmaking that almost single-handedly made Arnold Schwarzenegger a Hollywood superstar and heralded a renaissance in the swords 'n' sorcery genre. Written by Oliver Stone and directed by John Milius, it's a suitably bleak and macho piece of filmmaking where men are muscular, women are barely dressed and camels exist only to be punched in the face. In other words, it's bloody brilliant.

Chris Jenkins: 'Crom's eye!' This hi-def outing for the Cimmerian brute is every bit as rough and ready as the man himself. Presented as an AVC 2.35:1 1080p encode, *Conan the Barbarian* doesn't appear to have had much spit and polish applied to it recently. Small scratches and other minor blemishes are evident in a number of scenes and (outside of close-ups) there's very little to get excited about in the way of fine detail. Much of this may well be down to the original materials (the film stock used features a heavy grain structure) as even the colours don't appear particularly vibrant. It's a definite step up from previous DVD incarnations, but perhaps not as big a leap forward as fans may have been expecting – so it will be interesting to compare this to Universal's imminent US Blu-ray release to see if there are any differences in image quality.

Mark Craven: Disappointingly, this Blu-ray release suffers from the same problem as Fox's old R2 Special Edition DVD – the glaring omission of the original mono soundtrack. In its place we have a DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix, which appears to be the same surround track used on the DVD release, only now in lossless form. This means it's the same forced surround effects (which, thankfully, aren't too intrusive) and limited dynamics as before, only now with the added benefit of Basil Poledouris' triumphant score sounding richer than ever.

Anton van Beek: The majority of the extras here will be familiar to owners of the earlier R2 DVDs, including a commentary by John Milius and Arnie, a five-min reel of deleted scenes, a 53-min *Making of...* documentary, a featurette on Conan's literary background, a special effects comparison, an animated art gallery and a pair of trailers. But it does serve up a new featurette about the film's sword maker and unseen, archival interviews from 1982. Universal is promising an extended 136-min cut of the film and new *U-Control* features on its US release, neither of which is on this UK release.



Yoga, Arnie-style

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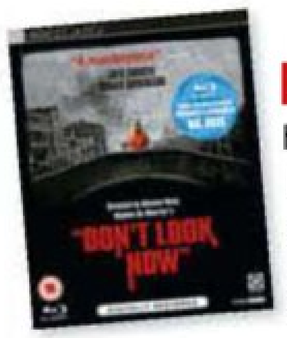
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Malevolence haunts la Serenissima

The dwarf in the red coat returns to the alleyways of Venice in Nic Roeg's masterpiece



Don't Look Now

has often been called one of the best films in the history of British cinema – and with good reason. Adapted from a short story by Daphne du Maurier, Nic Roeg's film is more than a mere horror film, rather it's an intriguing psychological study of grief centred on a married couple (played by Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie) who lose their daughter in a freak accident. And while the story that unfolds is itself gripping, it's the visual elements and symbols that Roeg brings into play that allows it to transcend the limitations of genre and become something truly special.

Chris Jenkins: Over the past decade, *Don't Look Now* has received three DVD releases in the UK, all of which appeared to be based on the same master. As good as they were, this Blu-ray release is a huge improvement. Supervised by Roeg, the new restoration brings fresh life to the film's beautiful colour palette, while the shift to 1080p resolution ensures that the AVC 1.85:1 encode unearths plenty of intricate detailing that went unnoticed on earlier incarnations. And, unlike some of Optimum's earlier restorations, DNR scrubbing isn't too much of an issue here either, with the print exhibiting plenty of grain.

Mark Craven: Your impression of this Blu-ray's soundtrack will be heavily dependent on whether or not you are familiar with the earlier DVD releases. For those of you coming to the film for the first time, it's just a nicely restored LPCM 2.0 that copes well with the limitations of the source material. However, readers who know the distorted music and inaudible dialogue on the old DVDs will see this as nothing less than a revelation. There's a clarity and range to the material (particularly Donaggio's haunting score) that has simply never been heard before, which makes this an unmitigated triumph.



It was always difficult getting to the car park at Glastonbury



HCC VERDICT

Don't Look Now
Optimum → Region B BD
£20 Approx

We say: Roeg's unsettling masterpiece finally gets the home release it deserves

Picture: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Sound: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Extras: 1 2 3 **4** 5
Movie: 1 2 3 4 **5**
Overall: 1 2 3 4 **5**

Anton van Beek: Optimum has wisely carried over the extras it prepared for its old Special Edition DVD releases, as well as providing a handful of exclusive goodies. In the former camp are a superb commentary by director Nic Roeg, an intro by Alan Jones, the 20-min retrospective featurette *Looking Back*, the trailer and a 16-min extract from a 1980s documentary about the director, entitled *Nothing is as it Seems*. Making their debut on the Blu-ray are lengthy interviews with composer Pino Donaggio, screenwriter/producer Allan Scott, cinematographer Tony Richmond, Donald Sutherland and fan Danny Boyle. The latter is also responsible for a compressed version of the film (a tribute to Roeg) included on the disc.

The Funhouse

Arrow → All-region BD
£28 Approx



Tobe Hooper's 1981 flick about a sleazy funfair that plays home to a deformed killer is a fun diversion for slasher fans, thanks to its eye-catching set design and sympathetic characters. While the AVC 2.35:1 1080p shows some print damage and looks pretty soft at times, it doesn't seem as noisy as Arrow's *Tenebrae* Blu-ray (right). Rather less impressive is the tinny (and lossy) DTS 2.0 audio. Alongside optional sleeves and booklet, the disc is packed with extras such as three audio commentaries, four interviews, an archival Q&A, the trailer and stills. ***MC***

1 2 **3** 4 5

Tenebrae

Arrow → All-region BD
£22 Approx



Arrow revisits another Dario Argento classic in HD, and once again fans are left with a Blu-ray that frustrates as much as it impresses. The disc is accompanied by a wealth of goodies including two commentaries, interviews, the trailer, footage of Goblin performing the title tracks from this film and *Phenomena* (with lossless audio!) and the usual poster, booklet and reversible sleeves. The problems stem from the AVC 1.85:1 1080p image, which – while better than the old UK DVD – suffers from contrast boosting and a surfeit of digital noise instead of genuine film grain. ***MC***

1 2 **3** 4 5

The New York Ripper

Shameless → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Lucio Fulci's 1982 slasher still troubles the BBFC today, as evidenced by 29 seconds of cuts made to this release. However this is mitigated somewhat by the use of substituted reaction shots and the addition of rare extra footage. The AVC 2.35:1 1080p encode features good colour saturation and plenty of fine grain (although some extra footage is sourced from non-HD material, so isn't quite up to the same standard) and the lossless mono audio (in English, Italian or Spanish) is clear but tinny. Extras include a booklet, interview and trailer. ***AvB***

1 2 **3** 4 5

The Witchfinder General

Odeon → All-region BD
£25 Approx



Odeon makes its hi-def debut with this 'Digitally Remastered Special Edition' of Michael Reeves' celebrated '60s shocker. While the source print still shows some wear and tear, the label deserves a big slap on the back for serving up a remarkable AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode that is far sharper and more vibrant than any version I've seen before. Similar praise can be extended to the clarity of the DTS-HD MA 2.0 dual-mono soundtrack.
A wealth of extras includes a commentary, documentary about Michael Reeves and a short film. ***AvB***

1 2 3 **4** 5

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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

My new kit rocks!

Thank you! I have changed my six-year-old AV kit. It comprised a 32in Samsung LC, a Samsung DVD player, a Denon AVR and Sky+. So, out with the old and in with the new!

I have kept my surround system I bought about six years ago – Monitor Audio Radius and a Velodyne CHT subwoofer, but I read your magazine, chose some new gear and have been impressed. This includes the new Onkyo TX-NR609 receiver, Panasonic DMP-BDT310 and Panasonic TX-P55VT30 plasma, bought from the Glasgow branch of Loud + Clear. They're a great bunch of guys who know their stuff, and are happy to demo new hardware and give you tips and pointers.



Onkyo's TX-NR609: Helping *HCC* reader David enjoy lossless surround sound

Anyway, I am blown away with the picture and the sound! The new Onkyo TX-NR609 has made such a big diffrence to the quality of the audio, and while my wife initially thought the TV was too big, after we had our first Blu-ray movie night she gave the thumbs up.

So a big thanks to *Home Cinema Choice* and Loud + Clear, who also helped set up the kit.

David Nimmo, Glasgow

We're glad you're enjoying your newly acquired kit so much, and that we could be of help in providing reviews of the latest gear on the market. It's always good to hear about an expert outfit like Loud + Clear, too.

Star Letter

Putting the 'bang' back into B&O

Can you please advise me?

As a child, my mum had a friend who we used to visit and he had a Bang & Olufsen system in his minimalist house! Because of this childhood memory I have always wanted a house dripping in B&O!

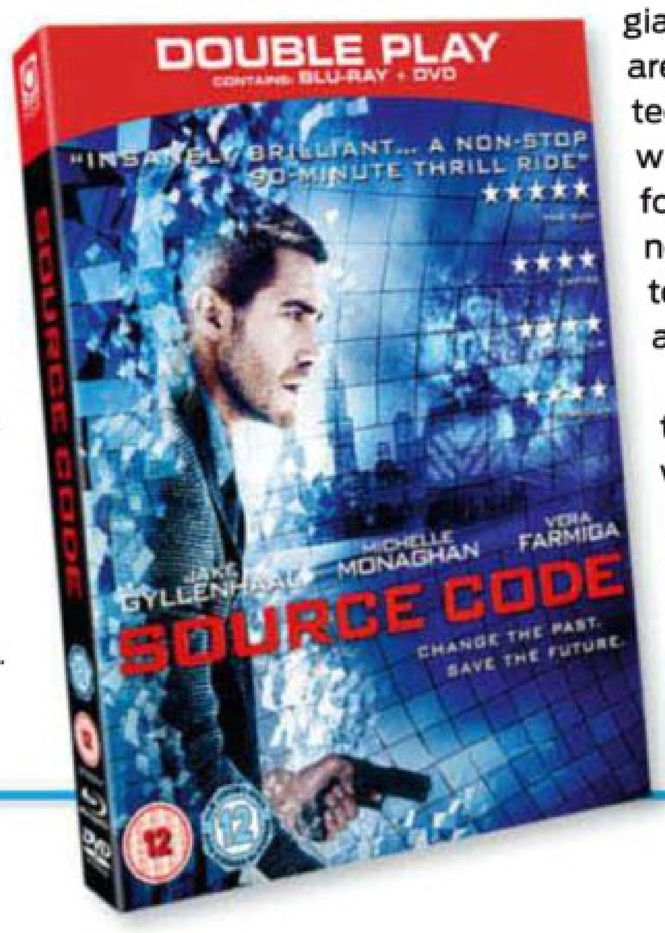
I am now 35 and have achieved the dream. However, anyone who now comes over looks at my system like it's made out of endangered panda skins.

Have I missed the point? Before my Bang & Olufsen spree, I had a house wired from 15 years of shopping at Richer Sounds – and the sound from my Eltax floorstanders and Yamaha amplifier was better.

So, I bought last month's *HCC* because I was scared that I am 10 years behind and from that issue it looks like I am. What is your opinion of B&O? Can it be built into a system worthy of a smile, instead of the kind of reaction you'd expect if you had a framed picture of Hitler on your wall?

I hope you publish my letter as I think there are many disillusioned people such as myself around. I think many people will just purchase a system from the likes of B&O because it's an all-in-one shop. After knowing the Manager & Assistant Manager of Richer Sounds Birmingham for over 10 years, when I told them what I had done they looked at me in disgust – and wouldn't even let me take a free lollipop. I think my letter could highlight to many readers the perils of purchasing decisions.

Matthew Rodney, via email



Thanks for your letter, it raised a smile but we can understand your problem. B&O certainly has a fabulous reputation, but mainly among people who have lots of money and not much knowledge about AV gear. The fact is that consumer giants such as Samsung are spending millions on technology R&D, while with B&O you're paying for what is not necessarily cutting-edge tech in a fancy case with an enormous price tag.

We're not suggesting there's anything wrong with B&O gear as such, it's just that it's not aimed at AV enthusiasts. If you spent the same sort of money on serious AV kit, you'd get a

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Kuro! Kuro! Kuro!

I am a subscriber to the mag, and when reading the Panasonic 55VT30 TV review (HCC #197), I noticed you state that the Panasonic has deeper black levels than the Pioneer Kuros. Can I ask what have you done to know this?
Matthew Bridger, via email

Good question. To test TVs we use a variety of tools including ChromaPure Pro software with a Chroma5Pro colorimeter supplied by Kalibrate. This system measures the light output from the screen and can calculate various values including black level, contrast and colour balance.

We admit that we didn't re-test a Kuro against the Panasonic in this case, and when we reviewed the last Kuro set (back in January 2009) we were using a different system – Datacolor software with a Spyder 2 meter – but of course, when calibrated properly, the two systems should have given consistent results. However, our reviewer John Archer did have extensive experience with the Kuro, so his subjective opinion was also significant in our conclusions.

Certainly, we were all keen to look at the Panasonic when it came, and there was general agreement that we hadn't seen anything better since the Kuro – but it might be interesting to get a Kuro in and re-test it at some stage. If we can find one!

stunning system, but what are you aiming for? Something that looks nice in your living room or serious performance? If you want some ideas, we suggest you contact your local CEDIA member for some advice about your custom installation options. And don't write off the less trendy but more AV-savvy manufacturers.

Winner: Star Letter writer Matthew wins a copy of *Source Code* on Double Play BD & DVD courtesy of Optimum Home Entertainment. It's available to buy from August 15, priced at £25 approx.

Blu-ray brings back memories

Thanks for the interesting write up about the renovation of the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

I loved cinema from the first time my school took me to see a film, probably in 1953 or 1954. I wanted to be a cinematographer, but living on a tiny nation there were no possibilities. But I did work as a projectionist at the local cinema for about three years, where thousands of feet of film passed between my fingers, sometimes stopping to have a look at that small 35mm picture with all its beauty.

I always loved *Bridge on the River Kwai* and I've bought the Blu-ray. When I sit in front of my three-metre screen with a SIM2 C3X behind me, I visualize those millions of pictures. I also love the flowing grain of the original film, which gives it life.

So my thanks to the people who made the renovation of this David Lean picture, as it was one of my favourites. Now I am wondering about *Lawrence of Arabia*!
Saviour Gauci, Malta

Thanks for your reminiscences. And, of course, your extensive spreadsheet detailing every DVD and Blu-ray you own – with over 4200 titles you beat The Beek! We'd be interested to see how many discs other readers own. Let us know...

Yesterday's 'smart'

Regarding the story on *HCC*'s website about Samsung's new Smart View app – what about the rest of us with older Samsung TVs? I have a UE46C8000 – not exactly a crap or cheap TV and not exactly old. If they aren't releasing an update for the older models to support this functionality because they want the cash, then why not offer it as a paid-for upgrade?
Anonymous, via the website

We certainly agree that the development of 'Smart TV' this year has led to older, supposedly 'smart' models looking somewhat outdated. And, as you point out, your screen is only a 2010 model. Unfortunately, we assume these new features are not firmware upgradable (newer features require greater processing power and memory), or, as you suggest, Samsung may have provided a pay-upgrade option.

Of course, you can smarten up your TV in other ways. Check out our roundup of next-gen Blu-ray players (page 75) which incorporate plenty of the Smart TV features offered on new TVs but at a fraction of the price.

Naughty boys

I was scanning through your mag the other day and came to your letters page. I couldn't quite believe my eyes, when not only did you effectively condone one of the letter writers for admitting to breaking the copyright laws on DVDs (by publishing it), but you actually gave them a prize for writing a letter about it.

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Due to the volume of letters we receive we cannot guarantee to print/answer them all.

You do know that using software to break the protection on DVDs (as stated in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act) is illegal don't you? You do know that Mac The Ripper, does about everything possible to remove any and all protection from a DVD too?

So why are you rewarding someone who openly states that they are illegally ripping DVDs, with software that contravenes the DMCA? Would one of Future's gaming magazines allow discussions about JTagged 360s, and ripping games to the hard drive? Or installing the homebrew channel on the Wii and ripping discs to a USB hard drive? I suspect not! Yet for some reason, *HCC* thinks it is okay to discuss illegal DVD ripping, and gives prizes out to those that do it... some messed up morals you seem to have there.

Of course, you're probably thinking... 'knows a lot about illegal console activity, probably pirates games, the hypocrite'. Well, the answer to that is no, I'm a 25-year games industry veteran, who actually respects copyright laws... you have to know about these things when your livelihood depends on it. And if you doubt the validity of that statement... Google my name.
Lee Cawley, via email

Thanks for your comments, Lee – sorry to have upset you by publishing the aforementioned letter. However, while *HCC* doesn't condone piracy and the downloading of pirated material, we do think the current law – which makes it illegal (in the UK anyway) to make a digital copy of legally purchased material for personal use – is so out of whack with the way consumers handle their media that it's unsupportable. Just because something's illegal doesn't make it reprehensible

How we test

Home Cinema Choice's hardware reviews combine the subjective opinion of our seasoned reviewers with hard technical data. **Chris Jenkins** explains how the *HCC* Tech Labs work

HCC hardware reviews combine the opinions of our experienced reviewers with objective technical data from our test lab. Here's how we do it...

HCC's gear reviews have a long tradition of combining the subjective opinions of experienced reviewers with hard scientific data from our test labs. That way, you can be sure that there's no danger of favouritism or prejudice creeping into the reviews – when we combine the reviewer's opinions with the test data, we can be sure that the results we present to you, the readers, are honest, reliable and accurate.

For over 20 years, we have been developing testing methods for every AV technology from CRT TV and VCRs to the latest 3D flatscreens, multichannel amplifiers and media players. Our testers have been trained by the ISF, Tektronix, Home Acoustic Alliance and other industry bodies, and we use industry-standard testing equipment so we can be confident our results make sense in terms of manufacturers' claims.

Our Tech Labs set-up consists of two main facilities.

The Viewing Room

Used mainly for testing TVs, projectors and speakers, the Viewing Room is designed to reproduce the conditions found in a typical mid-range home cinema installation. Created by award-winning custom installers Pounds (www.poundstv.co.uk), it's completely light-proofed for testing of TVs and projectors, is partially soundproofed using Acoustiblok (www.acoustiblok.com), and has been acoustically treated and tuned using custom absorbers and diffusers by the experts at RPG (www.rpg-europe.co.uk).

The room has a resident Crystal Acoustics TX-T2 7.2 speaker system, Onkyo TX-NR5008 receiver and a Screen Research 100in projection screen. TVs, projectors and other AVRs are moved in as needed for testing. We use a TV stand from Gecko (www.gecko-furniture.co.uk) for mounting flatscreens. A Philips 46PFL9705H TV is used for 3D movie and games playback. The room is fully cabled with speaker, HDMI, and interconnects from Peerless. Multiple displays can be fed from the same source using a Gefen 2-in-4-out HDMI switcher/splitter, and the room is also equipped with network connections.

The testing equipment used for TVs and projectors is the Chroma5Pro meter and ChromaPure Pro software supplied by Kalibrate Ltd (www.kalibrate.co.uk).

This sophisticated tristimulus colorimeter and analysis software allows us to measure functions such as contrast ratio, colour temperature and luminance, all essentials in picture performance.

The Test Lab

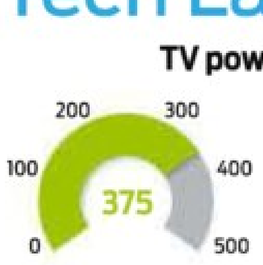
Mainly used for performance analysis of amplifiers and players, the Test Lab is equipped with an Audio Precision APX585 multichannel analyser. This generates programmable test signals, and runs a huge range of tests of functions such as output power, frequency response and distortion. It also has digital audio test functions. A Tektronix VM700 is used for analysis of analogue video signals.

Cables for the test system are again from Peerless.

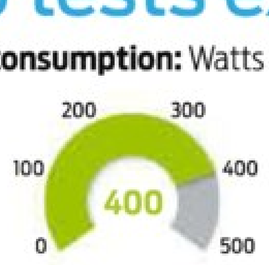
In addition to the main test units, we use a number of audio and video signal generators from Sencore and Snell & Wilcox, analogue test equipment such as a oscilloscope, mains power meters from Maplin, a library of test and measurement DVDs and Blu-rays (plus all the newest software releases), and standardised digital files for media players.

Tech Lab tests explained

TV power consumption: Watts



White screen: This is a measurement of a display's power consumption in Watts when displaying a pure white 100IRE signal with muted audio



Test footage: Here the power consumption is measured with a looped test sequence of live footage (complete with explosions!) and the audio volume up

TV contrast: ratio



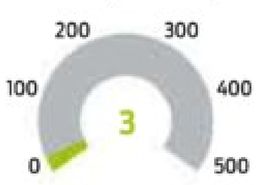
Picture: Contrast ratio claims by TV manufacturers are often extravagant, and don't follow an established standard. Our real-world measurements cut through the hype and allow one brand's contrast to be compared with another in a consistent way

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: Most TVs default to a picture setting, which is too bright and 'hot' (blue), in order to make them look good in shops, but also have a choice of colour temperature presets. We tell you which of these gets closest to the industry standard setting of 6,500K (D65)

Blu-ray/DVD power consumption: Watts

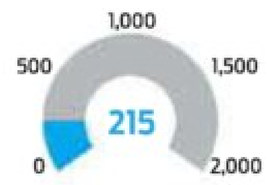


Idling: By EU regulation, standby power consumption for most devices is now under 1W, so we don't usually measure this; but the consumption when power is on can be considerably higher, so we measure this for DVD and Blu-ray players and some other devices



Playing: When a disc is spinning, the device's power consumption usually rises, so we measure when playing a standard disc. In theory, media players should display no change in consumption when playing

Audio Jitter: Ps



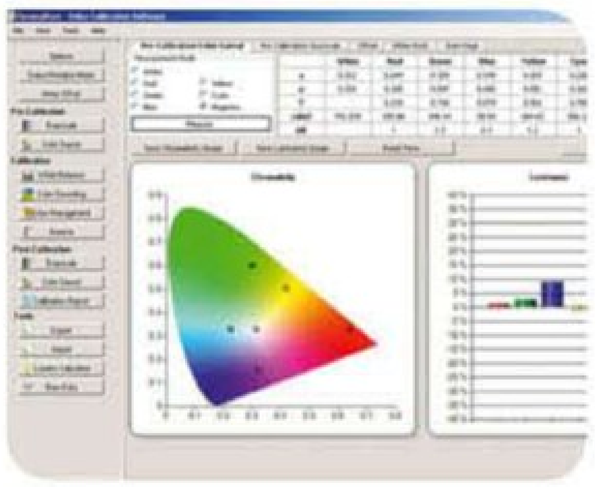
Sound: The analogue audio jitter from a device such as a Blu-ray player is measured in picoseconds. The lower the number, the better. Though analogue audio output is perhaps rarely used, jitter is often a good indicator of the general build and component quality of many devices

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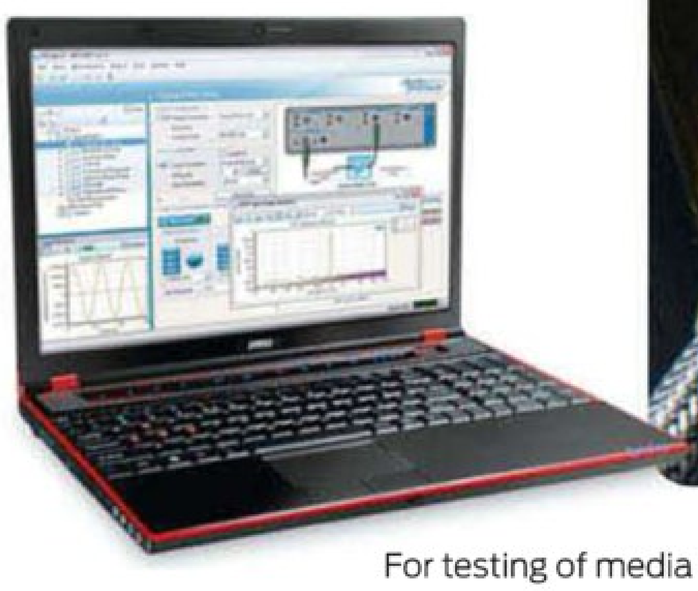
Release: StoreMags & FantaMag







Test bench: The Viewing Room (above) simulates a typical home cinema, while the MSI laptop runs test software for the APX585 analyser (right) and ChromaPure system (above right)



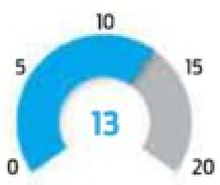


For testing of media software and portable testing applications, we use an MSI GT640 laptop PC with HDMI output and SRS sound.

Results

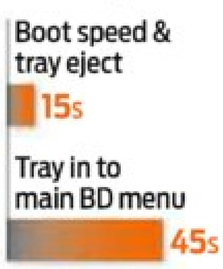
All this testing generates a huge mount of data, which is fed into product reviews and stored on our database. From this we can establish performance averages which help us to keep our scoring realistic. Of course, this mass of information is too unwieldy and detailed to publish in the magazine unedited, so our next job is to present it in a way which is meaningful and easy to understand. Our graphical presentations (see below) should make it all more digestible. So, while one key reviewer is normally by-lined for our tests, the whole team will have been involved in bringing you results you can rely on

Video Jitter: Ns



Vision: Again, the analogue video jitter of a DVD or BD player may be less relevant when the digital output is normally used, but it is a good indicator of general build and component quality. We also measure other video quality indicators such as chroma crosstalk and frequency response at 5.8MHz

Loading: Boot/Java



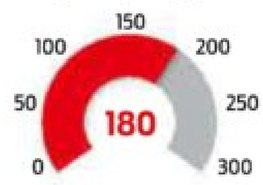
Disc loading & Java: Blu-ray disc players can be annoyingly slow to load and play discs, thanks mainly to the DRM and Java content. We measure times from power on to tray opening, and tray in to boot menu on a standard BD disc

AVR power: Watts

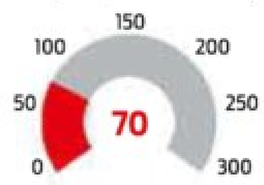


Powered: Power consumption of an AV amp can be high, but it's a requirement of decent output levels. We measure consumption in two states, when idle, and when loaded with a multichannel surround system

Amp output power: Watts (8Ω , 0.5% THD)

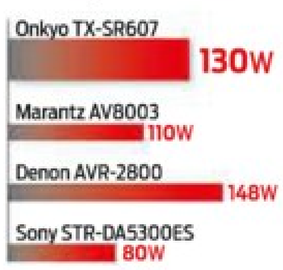


2-channel 8Ω: Manufacturers' claims for amplifier output power can be wildly exaggerated, and testing standards vary widely. Our tests deliver a figure for stereo performance with an 8Ω load, and quote a Total Harmonic Distortion result



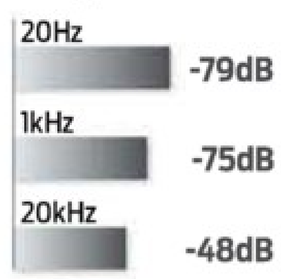
5-channel 8Ω: In most cases, multichannel performance will not match up to the two-channel figure. We push the products to its limit in multi-channel mode and quote the figure reached before unacceptable distortion results

Pure power: Watts



Fidelity firewall: This is our way of measuring an amp's output power ability before it is tainted by distortion. We measure at 1KHz with an 8Ω load to 0.05% THD to get an indication both of output power and component quality

Signal/noise: dB



S/N tests: These amp measurements reveal the ratio of signal to noise at a specific frequency. Low, mid and high readings are taken to determine the imaging and sonic character of the amp

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SELECT

➜ Buying Guide **BEST EVER LCD TV** The top performing LCD screens in the UK **HI-DEF PLAYERS** Looking for a Blu-ray deck? We help you choose **PLASMA POWER** Your guide to the ultimate bigscreen TV **ROCKIN' RECEIVERS** The best specs and latest codecs **SUPREME SPEAKERS** Need a 5.1 package? We name the best! **PLUS** subwoofers, projectors, PVRs & more...



HCC Ratings key

Officially awesome	1 2 3 4 **5**
Essential purchase	1 2 3 **4** 5
Does the job	1 2 **3** 4 5
Disappointing	1 **2** 3 4 5
Don't touch it	**1** 2 3 4 5

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
40in → KDL-40EX524
£800 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

40in Edge LED set with a wealth of Smart TV functions

Highs: VOD features are first-rate; USB timeshifting
Lows: Motion resolution isn't brilliant; no MKV support

→ Specifications
3D: No
Full HD: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 197
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



SAMSUNG
55in → UE55C9000
£7,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Flagship 3D set from Samsung is a true statement screen

Highs: Class-leading design; first-rate AV performance
Lows: Lacks the Smart Hub feature of Samsung's 2011 range

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



PHILIPS
58in → 58PFL9955H
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

The CinemaScope TV returns with 3D and LED backlighting

Highs: Ultra-wide form; 'net connectivity; picture performance
Lows: No HD tuner

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes (to 1080p)
2,560 x 1,080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Via HDMI only
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview

Tested: Issue 190
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



LG
47in → 47LW550T
£1,200 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Passive 3D set performs well and offers excellent value

Highs: Seven pairs of 3D spex provided; Smart TV features; fuss-free 3D viewing
Lows: Weak 2D-3D conversion

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, passive
Full HD: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes , Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 194
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



SONY
40in → KDL-40NX713
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

40incher with slick, pixel perfect performance

Highs: Outstanding HD picture with exceptional motion picture clarity; integrated Wi-Fi
Lows: Limited file support

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 193
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Also recommended...



TOSHIBA
55in → 55WL768
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Designer 55in 3D screen from Toshiba is worth a look

Highs: HD images; Resolution+ upscaling; full-bodied audio; Jacob Jensen styling
Lows: Crosstalk with 3D

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 2
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 191
For more info visit:
www.toshiba.co.uk



SAMSUNG
46in → LE46C750
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

3D for all. Affordable active shutter set with CCFL backlight

Highs: Good 2D performance and effective 2D-3D conversion
Lows: Crosstalk problems and narrow viewing angle

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 187
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



PANASONIC
42in → TX-L42E30B
£900 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Edge-lit LED TV is slightly overpriced, but worth a look

Highs: Natural-looking HD pictures; decent audio; healthy selection of features
Lows: Advert-laden EPG

→ Specifications
3D: No
Full HD: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 194
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

SAMSUNG
55in → UE55D8000
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



Samsung's cost-no-object 9000 series launched in 2010 but still tops the brand's range – however, if you want Samsung's most technologically advanced screen then look no further than its 2011 8000 series. These replace the Internet@TV portal with the much improved Smart Hub gateway, slim the bezel down, add in a Freesat HD tuner and knock a few grand off the price tag. And, of course, they retain the best-in-class picture performance.

Tested: Issue 196
For more info visit: www.samsung.co.uk

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD, Freesat HD

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Plasma TV

Best on test...



LG
50in → 50PX990
£1,600 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

THX 3D certified plasma with designer looks

Highs: Beautifully built; relatively little crosstalk with 3D;
Lows: Image retention issues; black levels could be better

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
Component: 1, PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 192
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65VT20
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

The biggest 3D TV currently available is worth the high ticket

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; minimal crosstalk with 3D images
Lows: Sucks electricity

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
Component 1, PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 186
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50GT30
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Second-gen 3D plasma from Panasonic is a videophile's dream

Highs: Stunning HD/3D pictures; robust build quality
Lows: No 3D glasses included; 3D pictures lack brightness

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
Component: 1, PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 195
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



LG
50in → P50PZ950T
£1,600 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Another excellent THX 3D plasma from LG

Highs: Smart TV features; solid 3D and 2D playback
Lows: Wi-Fi not integrated; eco modes weaken picture quality

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
Component: 1, PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 196
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50C6900
£1,300 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Excellent 50in 3D plasma from the Korean AV kings

Highs: Picture performance calibration tools; media functionality; value for money
Lows: Screen is quite reflective

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: Yes
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (1 RGB)
Component: 1, PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 191
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk

Also recommended...



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50G20
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Freeview HD and Freesat HD plasma is the FTA king

Highs: Performance; price; Freesat/Freeview HD tuners;
Lows: USB recording mode comes with strings attached

→ Specifications
3D: No
Full HD: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
Component: 1, PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
42in → TX-P42G15
£850 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Freesat HD NeoPDP at an enticing price

Highs: Wide viewing angle; excellent HD pics
Lows: Lacks brightness; three HDMIs only

→ Specifications
3D: No
Full HD: Yes
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
Component: 1, PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail
Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications
3D: No
Full HD: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
Component: 1, PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview

Tested: Issue 161
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
55in → TX-P55VT30
£2,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



Panasonic's new flagship TV continues the great work established by last year's VT20 range. Near flawless 3D images, inky blacks, natural-looking colours and extensive calibration options are again the order of the day – so much so that we can't think of a more cinematic flatscreen TV on the UK market. The VT30 also fights against plasma's old-fashioned image by offering a slinky, curvaceous design, and benefits from the reijgged VieraConnect Smart TV portal. For those who really want the best of the best, there's a 65in version available, too.

Tested: Issue 197
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, active shutter
Full HD: yes (up to 1080p)
Native resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview HD and Freesat HD

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Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Blu-ray players

Best on test...



DENON
Blu-ray → DVD-A1UD
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Reference universal Blu-ray player that sets new standards

Highs: Stunning lifelike picture; genuine hi-fi sound; awesome DVD upscaling
Lows: Complex to set up; not for those on a budget!

→ Specifications
3D: No
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk



PHILIPS
Blu-ray → BDP7500 MK II
£200 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Feature-packed and neatly designed 3D player

Highs: Overall picture and sound performance; slick GUI
Lows: Upscaling of DVDs could be better; not lightning quick

→ Specifications
3D: Yes
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; wi-fi via dongle; 2 x USB; Net TV portal

Tested: Issue 194
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S570
£230 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

3D Blu-ray spinner is packed with features

Highs: SACD playback; BBC iPlayer onboard
Lows: No multichannel phono outputs means you'll need a v1.4 AVR for 3D lossless audio

→ Specifications
3D: Yes
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
Multichannel phono out: No (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/No
Networkability: Ethernet; wi-fi, USB, iPlayer, LOVEFiLM

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



OPPO
Blu-ray → BDP-93EU
£500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

First 3D spinner from US brand majors on performance

Highs: Fast to load; great build quality and AV performance; SACD/DVD-A playback
Lows: Won't play MP3s for some reason

→ Specifications
3D: Yes
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
Multichannel phono: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet; USB; wi-fi via supplied dongle

Tested: Issue 196
For more info visit:
www.oppo-bluray.co.uk



DENON
Blu-ray → DBP-1611UD
£400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Affordbale universal player with no-nonsense build quality

Highs: Exceptional image clarity; decent file support; SACD/DVD-A playback
Lows: Media player suffers from poor navigation

→ Specifications
3D: Yes
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
Multichannel phono out: No (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/yes
Networkability: Ethernet; USB; YouTube

Tested: Issue 194
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

OPPO
Blu-ray → BDP-95EU → £900 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



Oppo's flagship Blu-ray player is a startling proposition, mixing universal playback (Super Audio CD, DVD-Audio, 3D/2D Blu-ray) with audiophile components and outputs. As such, it's sonically first-class, bringing a refined performance with both two-channel and multichannel sources. On top of this, the BDP-95EU offers excellent DVD upscaling (thanks to built-in Marvell Qdeo processing) and sumptuous Blu-ray playback. The surfeit of features (including potential multi-region/multi-zone capability) make it even more appetising.

Tested: Issue 197
For more info visit: www.avaficionado.co.uk

→ Specifications
3D: Yes
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Multichannel phono out: Yes, 7.1 (plus XLR stereo)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS HD-MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; 2 x USB; e-Sata;

Also recommended



ARCAM
Blu-ray → BDP100
£1,300 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Debut deck from Arcam offers few features but a solid BD/CD experience

Highs: Classy Blu-ray/DVD and CD quality; superb build
Lows: No online content or media streaming

→ Specifications
3D: No
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
Multichannel phono out: No (stereo only, two zones)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 194
For more info visit:
www.arcam.co.uk



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-D6900
£300 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Curious 3D BD/Freeview HD receiver hybrid

Highs: Good 2D-3D conversion; Smart Hub portal access; recording to USB
Lows: Average DVD upscaling; hit-and-miss streaming

→ Specifications
3D: Yes, plus 2D conversion
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
Multichannel phono out: No (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; wi-fi; USB; Smart Hub portal

Tested: Issue 195
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO
Blu-ray → Azur 650BD
£400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

First deck from UK brand is a solid performer – and multiregion DVD, too

Highs: Bulletproof build; excellent AV performance
Lows: No 'net features

→ Specifications
3D: No
Blu-ray profile: 2.0
Multichannel phono out: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet for BD-Live; 2 x USB

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.cambridgeaudio.com

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Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

Recorders

Best on test...



SAMSUNG
PVR → SMT-S7800
£280 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Samsung's debut Freesat HD PVR offers a smattering of Smart TV features, too

Highs: Neat design; optional wi-fi; intuitive GUI
Lows: Media player has fussy file support

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 197
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



HUMAX
Freeview HD PVR → HDR-FOX T2
£330 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

The pick of the new Freeview HD PVRs so far

Highs: Joy to use; multimedia talent; great performance
Lows: Cramped remote control; can't trim recordings

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview HD
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 187
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk



TECHNISAT
Freeview HD PVR → HDFV
£150 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Affordable Freeview HD PVR with external USB recording

Highs: Quality HD and upscaled SD performance; friendly user interface
Lows: USB files can't be played back elsewhere; single tuner

→ Specifications
HDD size: N/A – records to USB
Twin tuners: No, single Freeview HD tuner
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 188
For more info visit:
www.technisat.co.uk



SAMSUNG
Freeview HD PVR/BD → BD-D8500
£380 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

3D Blu-ray player with 500GB Freeview HD PVR

Highs: Abundant features; Smart Hub portal and network features; plays discs too!
Lows: Can't record two channels

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview HD
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 194
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



ECHOSTAR
Freesat PVR → HDS-600RS
£350 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Freesat+ PVR with integrated Slingbox technology

Highs: Built-in placeshifting; styliish; easy to use
Lows: Quality of 'slinged' video is low; app costs extra

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 196
For more info visit:
www.myechostar.com

Also recommended



TVONICS
PVR → DTR-HD500
£250 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Stylish 500GB twin tuner Freeview+ HD PVR

Highs: Commendable picture quality; neat design; twin HDMI inputs
Lows: USB ports are for JPEG display and service updates only

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview HD
HDMI: Yes, 2-in, 1-out with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 191
For more info visit:
www.tvonics.com



PHILIPS
Freeview HD PVR → HDT 8520
£250 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Sets a high standard for user-friendliness

Highs: Good quality HD and SD pics; cutting-edge looks
Lows: No multimedia functions; EPG can be frustrating

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview HD
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 185
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



3VIEW
Freeview HD PVR → 3VHD
£300 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Feature-packed DVB-T2 PVR/ media player hybrid

Highs: Online functionality; media player/server;
Lows: No digital teletext or integrated wi-fi

→ Specifications
HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, DVB-T2 (not Freeview certified as there is no 'red button' support)
HDMI: Yes, with 1080p upscaling
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 193
For more info visit:
www.3view.com

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
DVD/BDR → DMR-BWT700 → £500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5



Panasonic is unique in the UK market by offering Blu-ray/HDD recorders (Samsung's BD-D8500 will only play BDs, not rip to them), and the BWT700 is the most advanced we've ever seen, as it incorporates 3D Blu-ray playback and burning, too. In this regard it will easily appeal to 3D camcorder/ camera owners who want to archive their stereoscopic achievements – the rest of will just dig its myriad talents. Whether you want to watch a movie, timeshift a TV show, stream media files from your network or back up your recordings to disc for posterity, the BWT700 will do it.

Tested: Issue 197
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications
Hard disk: 500GB
Twin Tuners: Yes, 2 x Freeview HD
Component output: No
Format: BD-RE, BD-R, DVD-R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

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Release: StoreMags & FantaMag

StereoKaga.com

AV receivers

Best on test...



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR609
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Affordable 7.2-channel AVR with Spotify and 4K scaler

Highs: Overflowing with features; revamped design; involving audio performance
Lows: Doesn't like being driven too hard

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 160W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: No
THX certification: Select2 Plus
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.4a)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 195
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



ANTHEM
AVR → MRX 700
£2,100 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Sonically superior AVR that misses out on a few features

Highs: Fantastically engaging sound; excellent auto EQ system; brooding design
Lows: Only four HDMI inputs; setup not for the faint-hearted

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.4)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 195
For more info visit:
www.anthemavs.co.uk



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR5008
£2,400 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

New flagship receiver exhibits a smoother, mellower sound

Highs: Extensive codec support; ample connectivity, power on tap; network audio
Lows: Navigation could be more intuitive

→ Specifications
Power: 9 x 140W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Ultra 2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 8-in, 2-out (v1.4a)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 191
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



ARCAM
AVR → AVR400
£1,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Delicious-sounding Class A/B receiver will please audiophiles

Highs: Power output exceeds Arcam's own claims; sumptuous design and build
Lows: Lack of HDMI connections may hinder setup

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 90W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: (Yes FM/AM/net/DAB)
Dolby TrueHD
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 1-out (v1.4a)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 194
For more info visit:
www.arcam.co.uk



PIONEER
AVR → SC-LX83
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Pioneer's top-flight AVR mixes power, control and usabilty

Highs: Punchy, detailed, expansive sound; iControl app is superb; MCACC setup; RF remote handset
Lows: Seven-channel only

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 190W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Yes, Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 186
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

DENON
AVR → AVR-4311
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



With no 2011 successor to the AVR-4810, the 4311 takes the mantle of Denon's flagship receiver. It's no surprise, then, that it's a storming home cinema product. Its nine onboard amplifiers pack enough grunt to drive a serious speaker system, and it can run an 11-channel array with the help of a stereo amplifier. Performance, after Audyssey calibration, is glorious, and this is matched by a smart feature set – particularly Apple AirPlay, which will make you rethink your MP3 collection.

Tested: Issue 193
For more info visit: www.denon.co.uk

→ Specifications
Power: 9 x 170W (6Ω)
Upscaling to HDMI: Yes
Tuner: AM/FM/Net
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.4)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Also recommended...



MARANTZ
AVR → SR7005
£1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Marantz finally shakes off its 2-channel bias with this stonking multichannel marvel

Highs: Effortlessly achieves superb detail; great value
Lows: Lacks 9-ch output; not THX rated; tricky to set LFE

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 125W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 4
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.4a)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 187
For more info visit:
www.marantz.co.uk



DENON
AVR → AVR-2311
£800 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Mid-range Denon sounds good but is feature-lite

Highs: Articulate, fast-paced sound; digital iPod/iPad connection
Lows: Lack of networking is odd; no multichannel inputs

→ Specifications
Power: 7 x 135W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.4)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 190
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk



PIONEER
AVR → VSX-520
£300 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Affordable but stylish 3D-capable AVR

Highs: Classy design; decent sound quality; good feature count
Lows: Springclip speaker terminals; no OSD

→ Specifications
Power: 5 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: No
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 3-in, 1-out (v1.4)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 191
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk

Projectors

Best on test...



JVC
D-ILA → DLA-X7
£6,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Step up 3D D-ILA model for serious systems

Highs: Plenty of setup and calibration flexibility; first-rate visuals; quiet in operation
Lows: Slightly tricky colour management; minor crosstalk

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 70,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000hrs
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 195
For more info visit:
www.jvc.co.uk



SIM2
DLP → MICO 40
£11,00 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

SIM2's 'affordable' LED projector claims a 30,000-hour lamp life

Highs: Richly coloured, sharp pictures; nicely designed chassis; enormous setup flexibility
Lows: Bland remote and OS

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 700 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 50,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 30,000hrs
Fan noise: 25dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 189
For more info visit:
www.sim2.co.uk



BENQ
DLP → W1100
£900 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

DLP PJ delivers home cinema thrills for less than £1K

Highs: Extensive parameter controls; little rainbow effect; rich engrossing images
Lows: No vertical lens shift or frame interpolation

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 1
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 4,500:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000hrs
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 197
For more info visit:
benq.co.uk



JVC
D-ILA → DLA-X3
£3,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Good value video-chucker does 3D, too

Highs: Gorgeous 2D performance; versatile picture controls; low operational noise;
Lows: No THX preset; crosstalk with 3D pictures

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 50,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000hrs
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 193
For more info visit:
www.jvc.co.uk



SONY
SXRD → VPL-HW20
£2,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

New mid-range model from Sony delivers the goods

Highs: Design; excellent picture quality; good value
Lows: Adjustment tools aren't standard; no 12V trigger

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 80,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 6,000hrs
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 190
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Also recommended...



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW5500
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Epson's flagship home cinema projector does LCD proud

Highs: Lots of features; easy and flexible to setup; produces the finest LCD pictures yet
Lows: More expensive than rivals; can lose focus a little

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed) 200,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000hrs
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.epson.co.uk



VIVITEK
DLP → H1085
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

A brilliant full HD projector at a mouth-watering price

Highs: Rich colours; excellent image tweaks; 12V trigger
Lows: Noisy runner in high brightness mode; some low-level noise in darker scenes

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000hrs
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com



INFOCUS
DLP → SP8604
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Conventional DLP projector that's great value

Highs: Little rainbow effect; good calibration tools; sharp, detailed images with smooth motion
Lows: Somewhat noisy

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 3
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,700 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 30,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 28dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 196
For more info visit:
www.infocus.com

Editor's Choice...

SONY
SXRD → VPL-VW90ES
£5,400 Approx



1 2 3 4 **5**

Sony's new range-topping projector marries an exemplary 2D picture performance with one of the best Active Shutter 3D systems we've seen – extensive user features allow you to pretty much eliminate crosstalk niggles with three-dimensional images. Aside from its video prowess, it also features a smart design and solid build quality, inoffensive running noise and versatile installation options, including zoom focus and electronic lens shift.
The best 3D projector we've seen so far – JVC and chums will have to do well to beat it.

Tested: Issue 192
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk/biz

→ Specifications
1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 150,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): NA
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

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StereoKeys.com

Speaker systems

Best on test...



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → Platinum PL200AV
£11,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Dynamic, engaging sound with pin-sharp detail; taut, powerful bass; excellent build
Lows: Base plinths seem to belong to another design

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 250W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 100W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 1,000W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 184
For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.com



XTZ
5.1 → 99 Series
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Potent floorstanding system with serious driver tech

Highs: Solid build quality; detailed, expansive sound; lots of adjustability
Lows: Possibly confusing for the timid technophobe; mail order only

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 550W, 3 x 100W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 193
For more info visit:
www.audiosanctum.co.uk



ACOUSTIC ENERGY
5.1 → Aegis Neo V2
£1,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Traditional-looking 5.1 system does the job

Highs: Classy build; sophisticated sound with clean bass tones
Lows: At high volumes there's some slight distortion from the floorstanders

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 170W, 3 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 191
For more info visit:
www.acoustic-energy.co.uk



CANTON
5.1 → Vento 800 Series
£6,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

High-performance floorstanding array from Germany's no.1 speaker brand

Highs: Articulate centre channel; powerful subwoofer; beautiful design
Lows: Might make you want to upgrade your AVR...

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 200W, 3 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 194
For more info visit:
www.canton.de



KEF
5.1 → T-Series T205
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Slim and sultry 5.1 system looks gorgeous and offers sweet surround sonics

Highs: Tight, fast subwoofer and potent, clean-sounding satellites; neat design; wall- and stand-mounting options
Lows: Not for stereophiles or largescale rooms

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 100W, 3 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 192
For more info visit:
www.kef.com

Also recommended...



EMP TEK
7.1 → Impression
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Full-fat 7.1 array from new-to-the-UK American brand

Highs: Thrilling, large-scale sound; sweet HF reproduction and forthright midrange; sumptuous build and finish
Lows: Other systems offer greater bass depth and musical fidelity

→ Specifications
Power handling: 4 x 200W, 2 x 100W, 1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 193
For more info visit:
www.aldoussytems.com



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → Apex
£2,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Premium compact 5.1 system offers performance and style

Highs: Intricately detailed, articulate and powerful sound; supermodel looks; build quality
Lows: Expensive by normal compact system standards

→ Specifications
Power handling: 4 x 100, 1 x 200W;
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 500W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 190
For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.co.uk



JAMO
5.1 → D500
£1,700 Approx

1 2 3 **4** 5

Value-for-money THX Select2 system for your cinema room

Highs: Good build quality; keen price; THX sound is packed with definition and placement
Lows: Wall-mounting brackets could be improved; uninspiring to look at

→ Specifications
Power handling: 3 x 150W, 2 x 120W;
Rears: Dipoles
Subwoofer: 650W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 193
For more info visit:
www.jamo.com

Editor's Choice...

PSB
5.1 → Imagine Series
£3,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**



Canadian brand PSB may not be a household name in the UK but with systems like this mid-range marvel we hope that changes. This 5.1 Imagine Series array offers an astonishing performance for its £3,000 price tag – the Ferrofluid-cooled tweeters work in tandem with mid-range drivers and the 500W subwoofer to create an immersive, potent soundfield with both movies and music. Build quality is superb, and the curved edge design is pure class.

Tested: Issue 188
For more info visit: www.armourhome.co.uk

→ Specifications
Power handling: 2 x 200W, 3 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 500W
Finish: Wood
Bookshelf: No

StereoKaos.com

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Designed for the Audiophile, the Oppo BDP-95EU also features:
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- Balanced stereo XLR
- Toroidal transformer





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Subwoofers

Best on test...



BOWERS & WILKINS
SW → DB1
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

B&W's reference sub is both musical and powerful

Highs: Flexibile placement; sleek design; awesome sound
Lows: Not a budget option

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 17Hz-145Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,000W
Driver: 2 x 12in
Weight: 44kg
Enclosure: Bipolar sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 197
For more info visit:
www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk



VELODYNE
SW → CHT-15Q
£1,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Potent 15in woofer with excellent EQ system

Highs: Tremendous grip, power, and headroom; supplied remote control
Lows: Pretty dull to look at

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 23Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 750W
Driver: 15in
Weight: 34kg
Enclosure: Ported
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 189
For more info visit:
www.red-line.co.uk



PARADIGM
SW → Signature Sub 2
£7,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Reference grade sub for serious installs only

Highs: Astonishing power, control and speed; build quality is first rate
Lows Can you afford one?

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 7Hz-150Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 4,500W
Driver: 6 x 10in
Weight: 105.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
www.paradigm.com



BK ELECTRONICS
SW → XXLS400DF
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Another excellent affordable sub from the Brit-based brand

Highs: Clean, tight output with 'warm' feel from its Class AB amplification;
Lows: Black box design

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 19Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 400W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 29kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 191
For more info visit:
www.bekelec.com



POLK AUDIO
DSW → MicroPRO 2000
£1,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 **5**

Premium-level small-scale subwoofer

Highs: Superb performance from such a small unit; automatic RoomEQ
Lows: Expensive for an 8in

→ Specifications
Frequency response: 22-200Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 8in Weight: 15.4kg
Enclosure: Sealed, with passive radiator
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 186
For more info visit:
www.polkaudio.com

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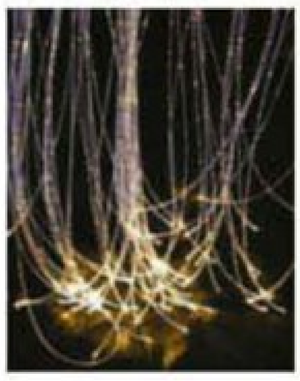
Starscape Fibre Optic & LED Lighting



Growing numbers of professional home cinema installers in the UK are turning to Starscape for fibre optic and LED solutions, not to mention our professional customers in Belgium, Switzerland, Portugal, South Africa, the Czech Republic and South Africa.

Photo: Artcoustic SA and Sphere Custom Design

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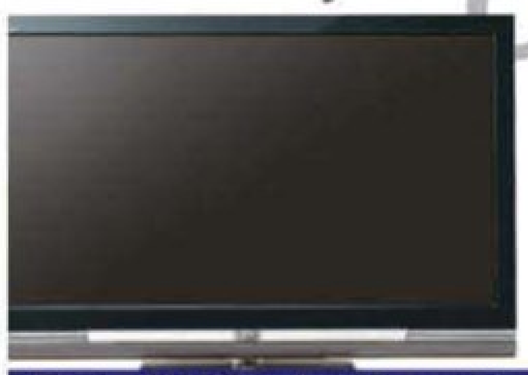
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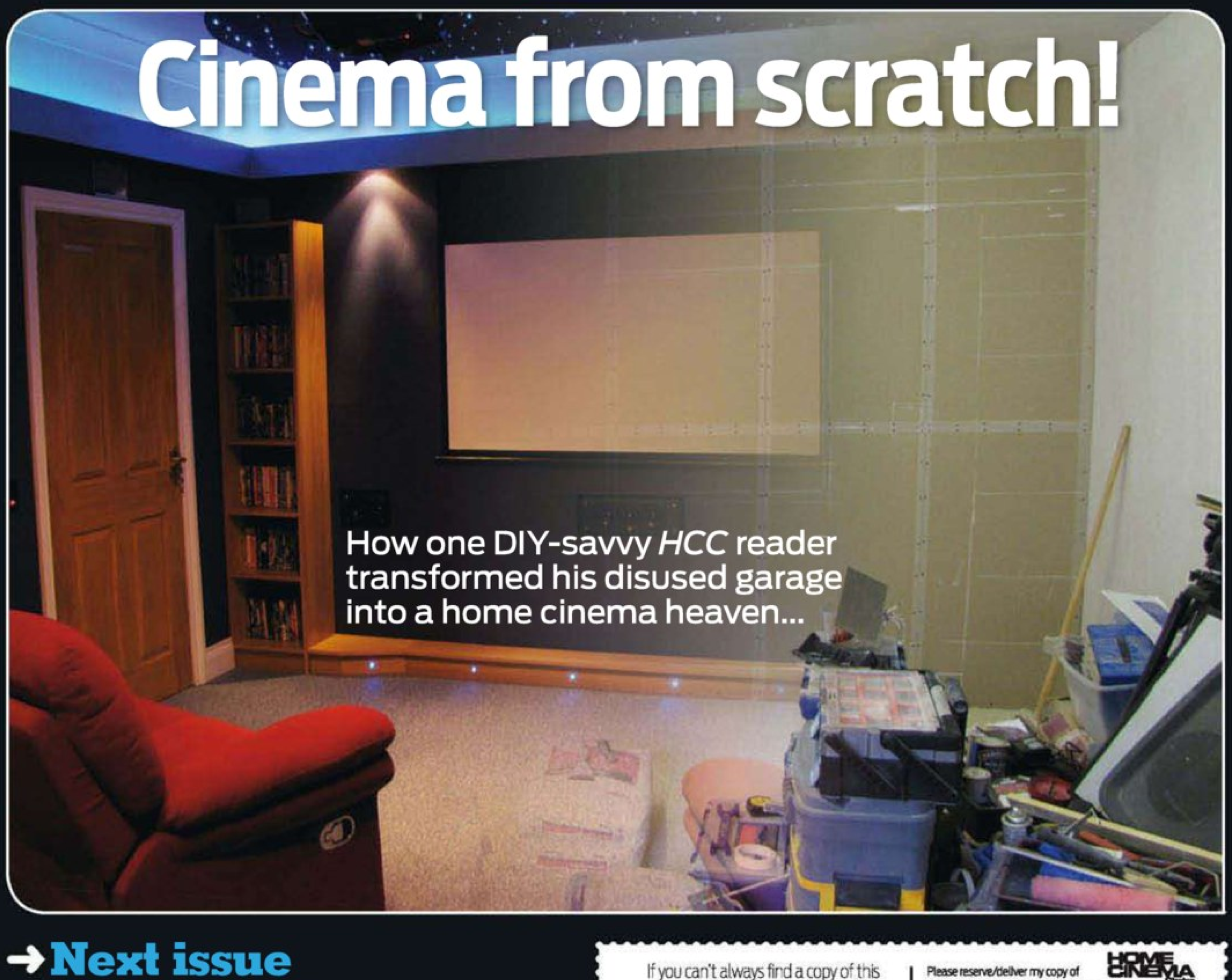
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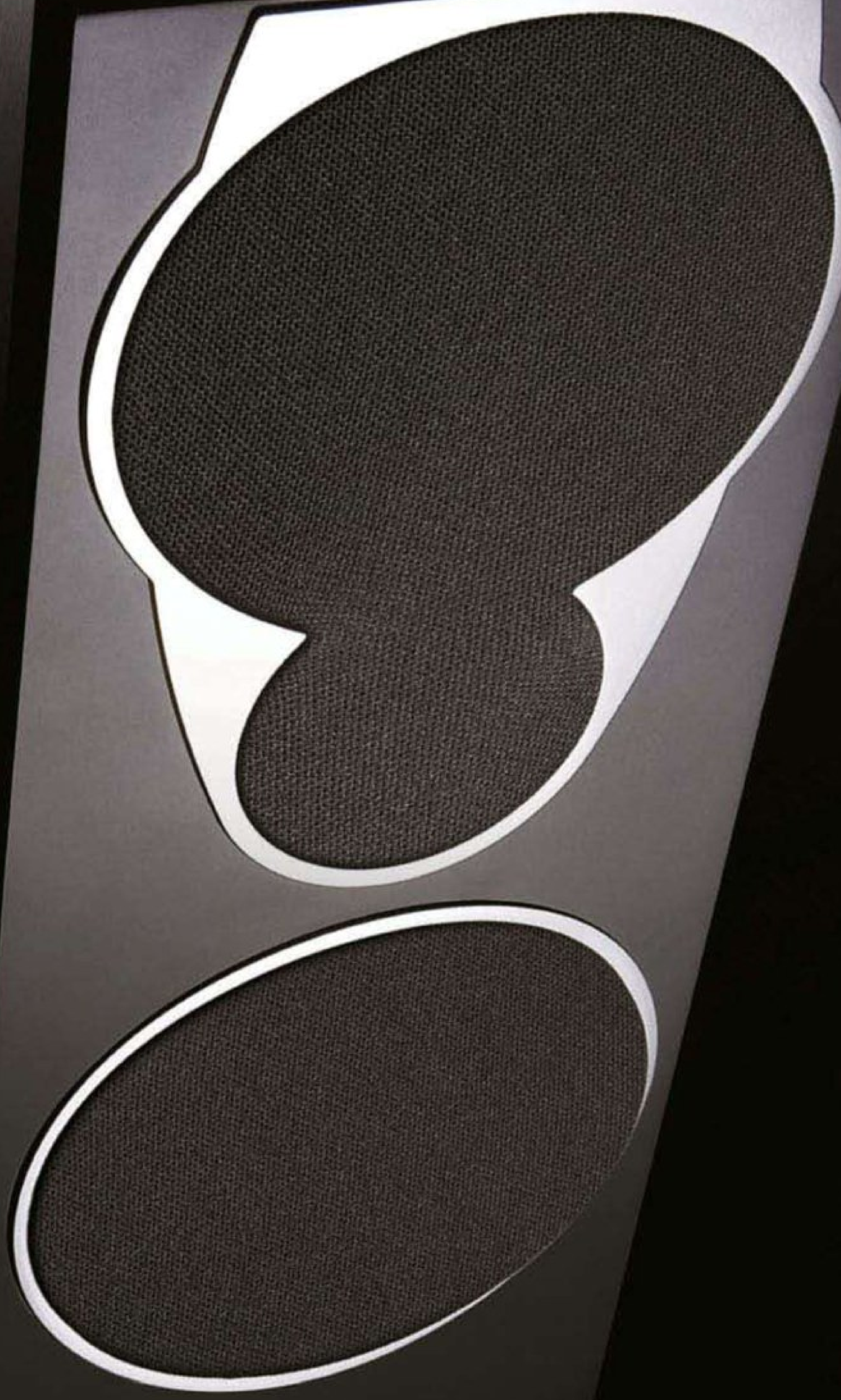
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